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Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

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Ed Nicholson

# 807 10101 Saskatchewan Drive
Edmonton. AB. T6E4R6

August 25, 2000.

Abstract

This study examines the personal and professional lives of ten teachers who were originally trained at the University of Alberta between 1945 and 1955, taught in the province of Alberta at the K-9 level, and retired here prior to 1990. A series of interviews combined with available personal historical artifacts (diaries, letters, school reports, etc.) were used to construct a life history for each research participant. The resulting life histories were analyzed individually and collectively to determine how the elements of a teacher's remembered and reconstructed past impacted on their educational philosophy and practice. It is also an exploration of what influenced my ten research participants to join the profession and how their personal and professional experiences as teachers contributed to the growth of their pedagogical knowledge.

It is hoped that the data collected in this study will further our understanding of how one learns to teach, as well as providing valuable insight into daily life on the professional knowledge landscape of the successful classroom teacher. The study concludes with several recommendations for change in existing teacher training institutions and further research into the lives of retired teachers.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE JOURNEY HOME: STUDYING THE LIFE HISTORIES OF RETIRED TEACHERS submitted by EDWARD NICHOLSON in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Grace Malicky
Dr. G. Malicky (Co-Supervisor)

H. W. Hodysh
Dr. H. Hodysh (Co-Supervisor)

Dr. D. Sande

Katherine Willson
Dr. K. Willson

R.G. McIntosh
Dr. G. McIntosh

Dr. M. Kompf (External Examiner)

Date: June 29, 2000

DEDICATION

I respectfully dedicate this thesis to the four women who have had a profound influence on my life and career:

- To my grandmother, Minerva Warburton MacLaughlin, who taught me at an early age to have respect for others and respect for myself. Her life was a fine example of how to live a moral and selfless existence.
- To my mother, Joyce Minerva Nicholson (née Warburton), my first teacher and lifelong friend. Thank you for the gifts of love of life, literature and music.
- To my aunt, Myrtle Nicholson, who dedicated her life as a teacher to serving the children and community of Ladysmith. One could not find a better career model.
- To my wife, Isla Marguerite Nicholson (née Adair), who for thirty years has been my partner and mentor. You have made all the difference.

ACKNOWLEGMENTS

The following dissertation relates the life history of ten Alberta teachers who are now retired from the profession. This study was made possible by the decision of each of these teachers to share their life stories with me in an honest and open manner. I hope they are pleased with my attempt to adequately represent in these pages the richness and productivity of their professional lives.

I would also like to recognize the contribution of the following individuals:

- Ray Warburton, and Ruth, Ken and Marilyn Weeks, the four teachers who volunteered to assist me in the pilot study for this dissertation.
- Mike Kostek and the staff of the Edmonton Public School Archives, who helped me to develop the historical context for the life histories included in my thesis.
- Dr. Jean Clandinin, who assisted me in the selection of a research topic and guided me through the candidacy process.
- Dr. Jose Da Costa, who served on my candidacy committee.
- Dr. Gordon McIntosh, Dr. Katherine Willson and Dr. Dave Sande, who not only served as members of my supervising committee, but offered me friendship and support throughout my doctoral program. Thank you for always finding time for me when I most needed it.
- Dr. Michael Kompf, who kindly agreed to serve as the external examiner on my committee on very short notice, yet provided excellent feedback on this thesis.
- Dr. Grace Malicky and Dr. Henry Hodysh, my graduate co-supervisors and advisors. In addition to my gratitude for the many hours of mentorship provided throughout my doctoral program, I wish to thank you both for allowing me to tell the story the way I wanted.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the tremendous support of my wife, Isla and my two sons, Kael and Quinn, who not only provided moral support throughout my program but actively assisted in the editorial process. I could not have done it without you.

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CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction: A Backward Glance

I can't remember when or how I first learned the alphabet, or numbers one to ten or even how to read, but I do remember when I decided to become a teacher. I was about four years old when this momentous decision was made, (which may be a record of some sort), and the person who deserves the credit for starting me down the pedagogical path was my brother, Don.

Don and Ed Nicholson 1947

Don was four years older than me and already a veteran of the classroom. One night as we lay in our bunks sharing our day, Don decided to teach me the continents of the world. Asia, Africa, Australia, South America, North America... there was a rhythm to their names which reminded me of the many nursery rhymes my mother had shared with me each night before sleeping. I sensed from my brother's enthusiasm that this was important information and my excitement grew the next evening when he showed me these wonderfully lyrical names printed on the colourful pages of his school Atlas. Learning with Don was easy.

Not too long after, while visiting my Aunt Myrtle in Ladysmith, I decided to demonstrate my new learning. My aunt, an elementary school teacher, was suitably impressed and asked me how I had learned the continent names. I identified my brother as the one responsible, and Don received even greater recognition from my teacher aunt for having taught me this valuable geographical information. As we drove back to our home in Saltair that evening, I remember feeling that somehow the edge had been taken off my accomplishment; obviously, the rewards were greater for being a teacher than for being a student.

David Hansen (1995), in his introduction to *The Call to Teach* suggests that those of us who become teachers " know something about ourselves, something important, valuable worth acting upon...one believes teaching to be potentially meaningful, as the way to instantiate one's desire to contribute to and engage with the world" [p. xiv]. It is my belief that my 'call' to be a teacher occurred long before I entered university to formally train for the profession.

For example, my younger sister, Pat, had little success in convincing me to play 'house' with her and her friends as a child, but if the 'house' was changed to a 'school' and I could be the 'teacher' the game was quite acceptable. I taught my sister just as my brother taught me. Few escaped my passion: family members, younger children in the neighbourhood, our Labrador retriever, Cindy. From card tricks to pet tricks, from times tables to Aesop's fables I had discovered the joy of learning and the special pleasure of imparting knowledge to others. In 1956, I taught my first Sunday School class at St. Andrew's United Church. In 1958, I joined the Future Teachers Club at Queen Elizabeth High School, which provided me with the opportunity to teach my first class at Grosvenor Elementary in Surrey at the age of 15. After that experience I was hooked. As Alexander Pope has said, I had "A fire in each eye and paper in each hand."

Over forty years later, I am back in the classroom and still learning how to teach. Arthur Chickening (1976) believes that our fifties are a time of "restabilization" and we often return to "earlier interests and priorities" [p. 65]. Donald Cruickshank et al. (1986) suggest that professionals - educators in particular- "experience life-span development, much of which is a function of the interaction of personal and work events" [p. 357]. As we near the end of our journey, "we ask ourselves some deep questions, the answers to which sometimes confirm and sometimes deny our personal and professional lives" [Ibid.]. Somewhere along the line my career path veered away from teaching. Now, after many years as a consultant and supervisor and school superintendent, I am back at university "re-storying" myself as a teacher. My own journey back has helped me to understand more clearly what initially 'called' me to teaching and what has compelled me to return to the classroom. The revisiting of my own educational experiences as both teacher and learner has allowed me to see connections between my personal and my professional past and to better understand the person I have become. Abbs (1974) believes the journey back can be used with students as well as teachers. "What better way," he maintains, " to assert the true knowledge than to set the student plowing the field of his own experience?" [p. 6]

Connelly and Clandinin (1994) suggest that we should think of our lives almost as one thinks of a work of fiction, complete with plot lines, characters and cultural and social settings. "Thinking of life as a story is a powerful way to imagine who we are, where we have been and where we are going" [p. 149]. One of the most useful activities I have undertaken as part of my doctoral program has been the keeping of a personal journal throughout the process. My only regret is that I was not self-disciplined enough to have kept a journal throughout my career. The journal has assisted me greatly in 'recovering' the ideas and insights that have come to me throughout the four years of my program, and I cannot help but wonder how many stories and understandings I have lost as a result of never writing them down. As I attempted to reconstruct my own biography, I was amazed (and saddened) to discover gaps in my recollections. It was particularly difficult to recapture a sense of what it had been like to interact in the classroom with the children on a day to day basis. Many of the stories that have survived involve critical incidents (Measor, 1985) in my career or special celebrations with students and colleagues, but I wish I could remember more clearly what it was like just to *be* with children learning together.

In describing his own writing Ledo Ivo once remarked, "I am the invention of my own words." By this he meant that we create and re-create ourselves every time we engage in the autobiographical process. As each of my stories has emerged, I have gained a clearer picture of not only why I chose teaching as a profession, but what kind of teacher image I have of myself. Some of my stories cast me as 'hero', others as 'villain' and as one professor has pointed out, I have also written a number of 'trickster' stories which reflect my belief in the importance of play in our work.

Some of us try to live lives with carefully charted courses; others seemingly abandon themselves to the winds of fate. The reality of all our existences ends up somewhere in between. As part of the preparation for my dissertation, I tried to reconstruct "the journey so far" by writing my autobiography and reconstructing memories of those events that served as harbingers of change. I also tried to recapture a sense of what it was like as a teacher on a day to day basis by examining the artifacts of my profession that have managed to survive a career spanning seven school districts in two provinces. Sporadic journal entries, communications to and from parents, collections of poems and daily lesson plans - all portray an existence I am having difficulty recalling. I do not remember myself as the author of these words. They are written by a stranger.

I understand more clearly now what Funkenstein (1993) meant when he wrote, "My acting in the world... is the continuous plotting of a narrative, interpreting the past and projecting the future according to my image of myself" [p. 22]. I have written down many of what Stahl (1983) refers to as personal experience stories - stories of childhood and university and my life as a teacher and administrator, but as I reread them I become aware of a subtle editing process. Sometimes the 'stranger' in my stories personifies the teacher I *tried* to be rather than the teacher I was. This fact is particularly evident when I hear what I regard as my own stories retold by others. How is it that we can have such different recollections of an event we experienced together?

Freedman (1990) believes that "Memory plus distance equals true autobiography" [p. 51]. Miriam Ben-Peretz (1995) in *Learning From Experience,* tells us that we gain pedagogical insight "by looking back at our own teaching, our personal past experiences and accomplishments and recalling significant events" [p. 122]. It is her idea that memory plays a key role in our ability to recall and, in most cases, reconstruct our past. As I have pursued my research in the area of teacher knowledge, I have come to realize what an important role memory plays in how we learn from both present and past experiences. Steedman (1986) wrote that "memory alone cannot resurrect past time, because it is memory itself that shapes it" [p. 29]. The realization that my own memories of past events were unreliable raised important considerations for biographical research in general. It became evident that the stories I hoped to collect from other teachers would require validation from other sources whenever possible.

In the original proposal for this dissertation, I had stated my intentions to tell the story of my journey into teaching alongside the life stories of the retired teachers selected for my study. I was interested in adopting what Chris Clark (1986) has referred to as the "friendship model" of collaborative research.

However, as I began my research, I found it increasingly necessary to keep my story separate from those of my research participants. Many of the experiences being shared by the teachers I interviewed were similar to my own, and it was difficult to refrain from "swapping" my story for one of theirs. I was concerned that the intrusion of my narrative might interfere with the telling of their own. In his paper, "Multiple 'I's': Dilemmas of Life History Research", Munro (1991) discusses the difficulty in producing an objective report from a shared participatory experience. Should the researcher remain invisible or strive for true collaboration? My decision was to focus my efforts on the lives of the teachers I had selected for my study.

1.2 Establishing a Purpose: Listening to Teachers' Voices

As I struggled to enter the conversation of research into teaching and teacher education, I became increasingly aware of how little has been written about the professional lives of teachers and how they develop what Schwab (1969) has referred to as the "wisdom of practice."

Grimmett and McKinnon (1992) state that part of our understanding of teaching comes through readers "living the life of particular teachers through stories, narrative, case studies and other forms of vicarious experience" [p. 396]. Over the years, I have read the autobiographies of many teachers or watched film versions of their productive lives (Gardner, 1991; Kaufman, 1964; Kohl, 1967). Some left me with a feeling of sadness while others were a source of inspiration, but all of them taught me something about the nature of my profession. If Grimmett and McKinnon are correct in that we have much to learn from these stories, why are they not featured more prominently in our teacher education curriculum? Early in my Ph D coursework, one of my professors suggested I read Philip Jackson's *Life in Classrooms*. Although I have now read more than 400 books and articles as part of my research, Jackson's portrayal of classroom life has had the most impact on my decision to study the lives of teachers. My personal journal entry for November 12, 1996 is a six page response to the following paragraph from Chapter 4, where Jackson is commenting on the interviews he conducted with fifty outstanding teachers:

> **It must be remembered, of course, that the impulses and intuitive hunches of most of these teachers had been tempered by years of practical experience. Thus, the basis of their action might be much more rational than their self-reports would lead us to believe. In their daily doings they may, in effect, be rendering "by heart" a type of performance that would have to be carefully reasoned and rehearsed by a group of novices. *But whether they advanced to this intuitive level late in their careers or whether they performed this way from the beginning is less important within the present context than is the fact that now, as seasoned teachers, they often reported themselves to be playing the melody by ear* [p. 145, Italics mine].**

In my journal, I reflected on the question of how I learned to teach and whether there were connections between his expression "playing the melody by ear" and the advice teacher educators often give to their students about the inherent dangers of 'winging it'. I thought about the many stories I had shared with both student and beginning teachers about classroom disasters that resulted from inadequate planning and preparation. I recalled a conversation with a young, very frustrated student teacher earlier that week and his comment that "I taught it exactly the same way she [the cooperating teacher] did, but the kids just wouldn't listen." My journal entry concludes with this statement:

> **Then how do we learn to teach - and is it really possible to teach young dogs old tricks? [Personal Journal, 1996 11 12]**

It was only later in my studies that I realized I had raised a question that has been debated for centuries. Kessels and Korthagen (1996) trace the argument back to the discussion between Plato and Aristotle over differing models of rationality. Plato believed in the value of *episteme* or conceptual knowledge while Aristotle argued that one couldn't ignore the importance of *phronesis,* or perceptual knowledge. In other words, scientific understanding **and** practical wisdom are required if one is to become a good teacher. I realized that much of my own knowledge about teaching had come from the stories shared with me by experienced colleagues, and that as a novice teacher educator I was using their stories as well as my own to illustrate important relationships between theory and practice.

I have often wondered as well how many untold teacher stories there are in the lives of our retired colleagues. Although some work has been undertaken by Oral History Associations in such countries as the United States and Great Britain to record the stories of teachers, many of these efforts are highly regionalized and are not conducted by educational researchers who might be more inclined to ask questions about the daily life in classrooms. There are also a number of biographies of 'great' teachers from the past, but very few that document the experiences of what Middleton and May (1997b), Casey (1993), and others have referred to as 'ordinary' teachers.

I had hoped to include the story of one such educator, my aunt, as an integral part of my dissertation. Sadly, she passed away just as I was beginning my doctoral studies. Myrtle Nicholson taught in the town of Ladysmith, B.C. in the same school for 45 years, finally retiring in 1974. Although she had guided me

Myrtle Nicholson.
Victoria Normal School 1928

and countless others over her long and successful career as a teacher, her story has never been told. I have often thought about the wealth of personal and practical experience her life represented, and recalled the many times I sought her advice on difficult decisions during my career as teacher and administrator. I remember the many stories of children she shared with me and can reflect now on the 'lessons' contained in those classroom tales. Hers was a rich and productive career and her nurturing, caring approach to teaching created a classroom community where every child felt safe and prepared to take risks.

I wondered how many other voices like 'Miss Nicholson's' have never been heard. I recall attending a luncheon for two retiring teachers and listening with fascination as they shared some of their early experiences in one-room schools and prairie winters. I also remembered teacher garage sales I visited with my wife where forty years of purchased and constructed teaching materials were handed over by a retiring master teacher to eager novices for a "dollar a box". If only there was some way, I thought, to pass on to these beginning teachers the wisdom stored in the one 'box' the teacher possessed that was not for sale that day.

Although a number of studies have investigated the lives of experienced teachers (Kohl, 1967; Burden 1982; Goodson, 1991; Huberman, 1989a; Butt & Raymond, 1989; Myklebust, 1998), there has been little research done on retired teachers *per se*. To explore this question further, I surveyed the existing body of educational research for references to retired teachers. I was looking for examples of how their stories may have been used to help us understand how we learn to teach. To my surprise, only a handful of researchers appear to have written extensively on this topic (e.g., Ben-Peretz, 1995; Middleton and May, 1996; Sacks, 1988; Ralph, 1994; Brunelle and Young, 1995; Weiler, 1992; Becker, 1970). Could we not learn a great deal from a lifetime of successful practice? Why are the ***voices*** of teachers so underrepresented in the research literature, while their ***stories*** remain a significant component of our folklore?

As Post-Modernist thought has migrated from the Arts to other disciplines, the term "voice" has also taken on new and diverse meanings. Foucault (1984) has exhorted researchers to include the voices of their subjects. Gilligan (1982) has tried to give voice to women, particularly as they strive to understand the nature of intimacy and caring relationships. Noddings (1992) and others have talked about the importance of hearing the 'moral' voice in teaching. In much of the current literature on teaching and teacher education, it is the *voice* of teachers - or the absence thereof - that is of particular interest to a growing number of researchers. Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (1990) for example, state that "what is missing from the knowledge base of teaching ... are the voices of the teachers themselves, the questions teachers ask...the interpretive frames teachers use to understand and improve their own classroom practices" [p. 2]. Carson (1995) has expressed concern that "curriculum talk" seems to be dominated by the "language of inputs and outputs" which caused him to ask: "Where is the teacher in this kind of talk?" [p. 307] Although researchers are interested in "getting inside" the teacher's head and consequently are spending longer and more intensive periods of time in the classroom, they still arrive with a predetermined agenda. Casey, cited by Goodson (1994), expressed concern that

> **By systematically failing to record the voices of ordinary teachers, the literature on educators' careers actually silences them...Theoretically, what emerges is an instrumental view of teachers, one in which they are reduced to objects to be manipulated for particular ends. [Casey, 1992, p. 188]**

Gitlin (1990) claims that teachers' concerns have not been addressed by research and their actual voices have been silenced. Butt et al. (1992), in describing an approach they characterize as "collaborative autobiography", suggest that "the notion of the teacher's voice is important in that it carries the tone, the language, the quality, the feelings, that are conveyed by the way a teacher speaks or writes" [p. 57].

Elbaz (1991) has also identified the need for the educational discourse on teacher knowledge and thinking to "make room" for teachers' expression of concern in their own voices. She is critical of the 'Western' assumption that all problems have solutions and of how inadequate this view is in describing the complex situation the teacher faces in the classroom:

> **... the language we have had available to talk about teaching has been not only inadequate but systematically biased against the faithful expression of the teacher's voice. Recognition of this has given rise to efforts to present the teacher's knowledge in its own terms, as it is embedded in the teacher's and the school's culture. [p. 11]**

Although it is not primarily a story of teachers or teaching, there is one book that has had a very profound effect on my thinking and understanding of the idea of voice, how important it is to listen, and how empowering it can be to be heard. *Landscape for a Good Woman* by Carolyn Steedman (1986) is her story about growing up in the 1950s in Lancashire as a weaver's daughter and then becoming a primary school teacher in South London. Steedman has much to share about the concept of voice, particularly those of women like herself, who frequently found their stories to be "in deep and ambiguous conflict with the official interpretative devices of the culture" [p. 6]. As a child, Steedman listened carefully to the stories told to her by her mother, stories that she characterizes as being "designed to show me the horrible unfairness of things, the subterranean culture of longing for that which one can never have" [p. 8].

Although I have learned much about women in teaching from my readings these past two years (Belenky *et al.,* 1986; Feiman-Nemser and Floden, 1986; Grumet, 1987; Noddings,1996), it is Steedman's story that has most helped me to understand some of the differences between my own journey and that undertaken by women in our profession. In telling her story and that of her mother, Steedman raises issues of class and gender and "lost" opportunities for women in the post-war era. She speaks of "watching" herself in a world focused on "things" and learning to see herself on the landscape of working class England. I paused in my reading one night to write in my journal: "I wonder if men spend time watching themselves. Do I? Does our journey differ in that we feel that it is up to others to watch **us?"** I am still searching for the answer to that question. As I reflect on my own story, I am amazed at how few obstacles there were in my life to any endeavour I undertook. Want to be a principal? Why not? Enter local politics? Certainly! Time to move on and take on a new challenge? Good for you! I had experienced none of the career roadblocks that others (Middleton, 1996; Grumet, 1987; Casey, 1993) have described. I simply followed what Guggenbuhl (1997) refers to as the "male quest experience", asking very few questions along the way.

As a researcher in the area of elementary teacher education, I became concerned about conducting ethnographical research into a profession composed predominantly of women. How comfortable (and thus, open) would they be in sharing their life histories with me? Would I be able to hear their stories and capture their voices as well as those experienced in feminist pedagogical research? (Middleton,1996; Gluck & Patai, 1991; Weiler, 1992) I addressed this question to Sue Middleton. Here is part of her response:

> **I think that rapport is a very personal thing. Gender is only one factor amongst many. I suggest you focus on establishing a trusting relationship with each teacher and let the stories tell themselves. [email, 1999 07 13]**

In another communication, Middleton also stressed the importance of allowing my research participants ample opportunity to read over the interview transcripts and make any changes they deemed necessary in their own story.

What I have learned from Steedman and others is the importance of making a 'case study' of one's self and how to 'weave' the many bits and pieces of story that emerge from memory into a personal history. As Maxine Greene (1978) suggests, each of us sees the world from our own unique perspective based on our personal experience:

> **Persons are more likely to ask their own questions and seek their own transcendence when they feel themselves grounded in their personal histories, their lived lives. That is what I mean by "landscapes." A human being lives, as it were, in two orders—one created by his or her relations with the perceptual fields that are given in experience, the other created by his or her relations with a human and social environment. [p. 2]**

The weaving together exercise continued as I proceeded with my research and "re-search" for the answers to some of the questions and concerns raised here about gender and voice and the 'knowing' of teaching. I also found that my research was becoming focused: I wanted to find out what ***retired*** teachers could tell us about both becoming and being a teacher.

1.3 Refining the Topic: Why Study Retired Teachers?

As Ralph (1994) indicates in the introduction to his research on retired teachers, "These veterans accumulated insights which can contribute an enriched dimension of wisdom regarding the development of teacher education programs" [p. 62]. Unfortunately, as a review of the literature available on retired teachers described in Chapter 2 reveals, very little research has been done in this area. There are even fewer studies that focus on retired teachers as a separate entity.

A very practical reason for studying the lives of this group is the rapidly aging nature of the teaching force in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, in 1975-76, 37% of teachers were younger than 30 years of age and 51% were between 31 and 49 years of age. By1985-86, only 9% of teachers were in the under 30 group while the 31 to 49 age group had increased to 76% of the teaching population [see Kompf, 1991, p. 479]. Furthermore, a 1992 study by King and Peart for the Canadian Teachers' Federation indicated that only 47% of the teachers in this country aged 30 and younger expect to remain in the profession for more than ten years [p. 37]. This contrasts sharply with Kompf's (Ibid.) survey of 820 retired Ontario teachers, in which 81% indicated that they would still choose teaching as a career. If our teaching force is aging rapidly, retiring earlier or leaving after only ten years in the profession, where will we find the experiential leadership for the profession in the future? Kompf estimates that in Ontario alone, the ten year turnover of 97% of the teaching staff in that province results in a loss of over two million years of teaching experience. He concludes:

> **Given the large number of retired teachers and the expertise they possess, it is ironic that few research efforts have been directed toward understanding development in later life or beneficially exploiting their practical knowledge of teaching. [p. 479]**

David Hobson (1994) is another researcher who has recognized the value in the knowledge of teaching possessed by retired or retiring teachers. Hobson collaborated with his graduate students at National-Louis University on a research project designed to answer the question, "What does it mean to be a teacher?" After discussing a number of different approaches to the research, the consensus was

> **We would talk with retired teachers. Who better than persons like ourselves, but even more experienced and presumably wise, to talk with about what it means to be a teacher? How better to gather insights informed by long years of classroom experience? [p. 79]**

Dewey believed in the concept of lifelong learning. In 1938 he wrote "In a certain sense every experience should do something to prepare a person for later experiences of a deeper and more expansive quality. That is the very meaning of growth, continuity, reconstruction of experience" [p. 47].

Michael Connelly, in his introduction to *Learning from Experience* (Ben-Peretz, 1995), states that the stories of teachers are constructed from "layer upon layer of experience, ever shifting nets of memories and situations in which they are called forth... retired teacher memories are not so much discrete, value-free data as they are elaborate, emotionally laden, intentional constructions" [p. xvi].

Although their individual stories continue, I am interested in the sense of a completed journey retired teachers may have of their careers. Teachers who have not only a lifetime of experience behind them but the time to reflect upon that experience may have a clearer idea of how they learned to teach. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has pointed out, we are beginning to realize that "the elderly are more than custodians of heritage. They are people in their own right, active in the present, and experts on what this period in the life cycle is all about. They are not only witnesses to what once was, they are also individuals with a profound need to be witnessed" [cited in Mullen, 1992, p.9].

In a sense, retired teachers are also 'historical' figures. Their stories are a form of history that has been neglected by historians just as research into teaching has ignored the daily life of the classroom, leaving teachers as "shadowy figures on the educational landscape" [Goodson, 1994; p. 6]. I am hopeful that my research will help these small but significant figures spring to life on a tapestry of teaching alongside Dewey, Whitehead, Bruner and other key characters in the story of teaching.

1.4 The Research Context: Creating a Tapestry of Teaching

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *contexture* as "the act of weaving or assembling of parts". The OED also traces the etymology of the word to the Latin *contextus* meaning "coherence or sequence of words" and *contexere* or a 'joining together'. For me, the word contexture has a visual and kinesthetic meaning as well. It evokes memories of textbook illustrations of the Bayeux tapestry and the story of the Norman Conquest of England. The Bayeux tapestry portrays the significant events of 11th Century Britain and the historical figures that took part in them: William and Mathilde of Normandy, Harold and Ealdgyth of Essex, etc. However, what fascinates me the most about this beautiful work of art is the vibrant portrayal of activities in the lives of *everyday people*. In each panel, farmers and woodcutters, housewives and merchants go about their business seemingly oblivious to the momentous occasions occurring around them. Bishops in full regalia rub shoulders with peasants, milkmaids share panels with noble ladies and their entourage, a king slumps to the ground mortally wounded while fishermen haul in the daily catch. It is a colourful, crowded parade of medieval history.

Ayers (1989) in *The Good Preschool Teacher* writes that "The secret of teaching after all is in the detail of everyday practice, the very stuff that is washed away in attempts to generalize about teaching" [p. 4]. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) suggest that we need to be concerned with "the everyday business of schooling, whether tense and problematic or routine and cyclic" [p. 135]. I think it is important for us to study the "everyday" life of the classroom teacher and examine in particular those events that are unlikely to make their way into the history books.

In part, I see my work as an effort to weave the stories of my research participants into a tapestry of teaching; one which will help other teachers - particularly those who are entering the profession - to understand how our personal and our professional experiences come together as the warp and weft of our lives. How do teachers, while living and working with children in the classroom, make sense of what is happening around them? How do they use these experiences to improve the quality of their teaching? Although considerable research has been completed on how 'critical' incidents in the lives of teachers expand their knowledge of their profession, little effort has been expended examining how the more mundane elements of school life might contribute to our understanding of teaching.

In this dissertation, I hope to demonstrate that our knowledge of teaching grows not only through sudden insight but incrementally as well, and that many of the most important changes in how we teach are a result of our learning through small but significant events which occur on a regular basis.

1.5 Establishing a Background: The Historical Landscape

> **...we need to search backwards from the vantage point of the present in order to appraise things in the past and attribute meaning to them. When events and entities in the past have been given their meaning in this way, then we can trace forward what we have already traced backwards, and make a history [Steedman, 1986, p. 21].**

In order to appreciate the significance of the events retold in the stories of my research participants, it is important to understand the historical context in which these events occurred. To fully understand any story of the lives of teachers it is necessary to study the society in which they worked and lived as well. Although I am not a historian, in Chapter 4 I have provided a brief historical framework for this study, which encompasses the era from their birth in the early decades of this century up to the time of their retirement. It is intended to 'set the stage' for their teaching stories which are an integral part of their individual histories. Hopefully, it will also provide a backdrop for the important events that served as milestones on their professional journeys. As we explore the unique history of each of the ten retired teachers included in this study, it will become clear that not only their teaching but their decision to become teachers was influenced by the historical events and societal trends that characterized their epoch. As their stories indicate, these ten teachers were born and raised in turbulent times. They all moved from childhood, through adolescence and into young adulthood in an era inscribed by the Great Depression, World War II, and the booming post-war society of 1945-1955, when they began their careers as teachers. It was a period of rapid change with a war ending, an economy booming and the pace of living accelerating. It was a time that saw the emergence of Canada as a nation on the world stage and a shift in Alberta from an agrarian society to a more diversified economy focused on resource development and industry.

As I will discuss in Chapter 4, there were sweeping changes occurring in education at the same time. The teachers in this study lived and taught in a period that saw the little white schoolhouse replaced by the yellow school bus. Progressive education, student-centred teaching and open classrooms all took their turn on the professional landscape. The story of men returning to teaching positions they held before the war and the often competing story of women reluctant to relinquish their newly obtained status in the workplace, provides a rich backdrop for the lives of those teachers who entered the profession during this period.

1.6 The Research Question: How Do We Learn to Teach?

The aim of this study is to establish through life history research how the elements of teachers' remembered and reconstructed past impacted on their personal and professional lives. It is an exploration of what influenced my ten research participants to become teachers and how their personal and professional experiences as teachers contributed to the growth of their pedagogical knowledge. I am particularly interested in telling the everyday stories of classroom teachers and making them "important partners in the creation of knowledge about education" [Schubert, 1991, p. 207].

The key questions to be addressed in this study are as follows:

1. **What do retired teachers consider to be the relative impact of their own schooling experiences, their friends and families, and society in general on how they learned to teach?**
2. **How do teachers transform their school experience into professional knowledge?**
3. **What do retired teachers feel are the characteristics of a good teacher?**
4. **How do retired teachers view their lives in retrospect?**

These four questions helped me to develop the research methodology and provided a general framework for the teacher interviews. They remain valid questions in defining the purpose of my study, and are addressed in Chapters 5 through 8. However, as I began to analyze the interview data, it became apparent that it was the *differences* not the commonalities in the stories of the retired teachers which provided the real answer to the question of how teachers evolve into their profession. As a result, in my research I have tried to go beyond an analysis of their collected teaching stories for common themes and metaphors, attempting instead to emphasize the unique life story of each retired teacher in my study. The result was ten life histories, each of which tells its own story of the development of a teacher.

Although Butt et al. (1986) believe it is possible to generalize from this type of research by comparing and contrasting small collections of teacher stories, in this study I am primarily interested in examining the *differences* in the life histories of my research participants and the highly idiosyncratic nature of the teaching experience. In philosophical terms, this has resulted in a shift in research emphasis from *episteme* to *phronesis* [Kessels and Korthagen, 1996].

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Thomas (1995) has suggested that "If there are no innocent texts, there are no privileged interpretations" [p.19]. He believes it is essential for the researcher to provide the reader with an autobiography so that its influence on the interpretation is clear. I began this chapter with a personal narrative so that the reader would be aware of the bias I bring to this research. I have already discussed my concerns about gender bias and the inherent dangers during interviewing of 'controlling' the text. Borland, in a 1991 article entitled "That's Not What I Said" warns about the dangers of "appropriating" the stories of others for research purposes and feels that "our scholarly representations of those performances, if not sensitively presented, may constitute an attack on our collaborator's carefully constructed sense of self" [p. 71].

Another concern is one of contextualization. The life stories represented herein are applicable only to the period and place under study. Qualitative research is by definition "messy" and there is almost no limit to the conclusions we can draw from it. Moving too far away from the context can "introduce serious distortions" in our findings (Doyle, 1997, p. 97). However, as Ayers (1989) has argued, it is better to discover a lot about a few teachers, rather than a little about a lot of teachers so that one can both learn from and celebrate "the particular, the uncommon, and the unpredictable" [p. 5].

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

As all of my previous experience in educational research had been conducted in the quantitative paradigm, I found it necessary to complete considerable background reading of teacher education studies that utilized qualitative investigative techniques. This chapter is intended to present a general overview of the literature associated with my research. Specific citations are also provided throughout the dissertation where connections can be made between my own observations and conclusions and those in the broader field of research literature on teaching and teacher education.

2.1 The "Sacred Story" of Theory to Practice

Alfred North Whitehead is said to have remarked that: "All knowledge is a footnote to Plato." In some ways the search for the eternal and unchanging Platonic Forms of 'true' knowledge or *episteme* remains a focus of our educational system. It is reflected in the increasing popularity of Charter schools which espouse Perennialist educational philosophy and offer a curriculum based on classical disciplines of study; i.e., the " Great Works" of humankind. It is also found in the Essentialist view of education characterized by the "back to basics" movement, designed to prepare what Plato referred to as the "Bronze class" of citizenry for a working class existence (Cornforth, 1957). Working from an *a priori* assumption that a single, explicable reality exists, educational researchers, like their counterparts in science, have striven to produce results that are reliable and statistically generalizable (Oberle, 1991). Aoki (1991) refers to this positivistic view of learning as the "black box" view of teaching, one that displays a willful ignoring of the lived world of teachers and students.

> **In this black box view of teaching, what I resent is the way in which it is ignoring the lives of teachers and students, they are cast into nothingness. For me, the black box reflects a frightening ignorance of so called educational researchers, who are forgetful they are not merely researchers but *educational* researchers. They forget the adjective...denying the humanness that lies at the core of what education is. [p. 1]**

Bruner (1986) has suggested that there are two fundamental ways of knowing about our world, the paradigmatic and the narrative. It is the paradigmatic mode that searches for universal truths and conditions. Once we "know" in theoretical terms what processes are required to be an effective teacher or learner, it should be a relatively straightforward task to transmit this knowledge to others so that they may become effective practitioners. During the 1960s, 70s and 80s, educational research was dominated by this empirical view of teaching and learning, a model developed as an outgrowth of the Behavioural Psychology of Watson (1939) and Skinner (1953).

Since *Sputnik* began orbiting the earth in October of 1957, both the professional and popular press have lamented the decline in Western educational standards. Books and reports like *A Nation at Risk*, *Crisis in the Classroom*, and *Why Children Fail* have severely criticized the public school system. *Tomorrow's Teachers*, a report by the prestigious Holmes Group (1986), expresses sympathy for the fact that teachers' jobs as they exist today were designed for "a society in which most Americans could barely read, in which books beside the Bible were rare, and in which teachers were paid in pumpkins and firewood" [p.8]. However, the same report is quick to blame universities for their failure to modernize their teaching and to adopt a "scientifically defensible curriculum."

> **... undergraduate 'methods' courses must be replaced with subject matter oriented studies of teaching and learning. This work should be based on the best understanding - from academic research and clinical studies of practice - of good teaching and learning in specific subjects. [p. 18]**

It is therefore not surprising that much of the *research* in teacher education reflects essentialist and behaviouralist philosophical viewpoints; what is surprising is that much of the *curriculum* in our teacher training institutions seems - almost paradoxically - to be oriented towards the Progressivist philosophy of John Dewey and his followers. Student teachers are often confused and frustrated by their inability to translate many of the principles of instruction and learning they master at the university into effective teaching during their practicum. Why doesn't theory translate effectively into practice? Their sponsor teachers, having undergone a similar experience, simply nod wisely and tell the bewildered student, "Don't worry. Once you're actually out here, you'll learn how to teach."

As Smits (1994) has pointed out,

> **Teacher education programs tend to expect student teachers to be able to translate university education into teaching practice. However, in the experiences of learning to become a teacher, the link between theory and practice is neither linear and causal nor unmediated by other contextual and personal factors. It should not be surprising when student teachers often experience the university part of their teacher education as being impractical or irrelevant. [p. 6]**

Although some researchers (Schwab, 1969; Lortie, 1975; Jackson, 1968) have questioned the emphasis on theory in a field so dependent on good practice, the idea that good teaching could be quantitatively defined prevailed for most of the last century. Today there is wider acceptance amongst researchers that teachers construct their own knowledge of teaching (Alexander et al., 1992; Gudmundsdottir, 1991; Sparks-Langer and Colton, 1991; Goodson, 1994; Carter, 1995), but there are still those who believe the epistemology of teaching can be packaged and delivered [Gage, 1985; Stones, 1990; Berliner, 1987].

Smits (1994) suggests that in the late twentieth century there has been a gradual shift from the modernist to a postmodernist perspective in education. Postmodernism questions the certainty of teacher education knowledge, and is responsible for an increased interest in reflective practice and in understanding the lived experiences and stories of those involved in teacher education [p. 15].

Ted Aoki (1991) has identified a need to orient ourselves on the 'beingness' rather than the science of teaching so that we will "be able to hear better voices of what teaching essentially *is*" [p. 3]. Butt et al. (1992) believe that our "preoccupation with prescription" has led to a body of research that is largely ignored by teachers because "they have found that little of this prescriptive technology is appropriate to specific situations whose nature is uniquely personal, instinctive, intuitive, reflective and practical" [p. 52].

However, a review of the current literature on teaching and teacher education indicates that the concept of learning how to teach from a theoretical base is still the "sacred story" (Crites, 1971) of our teacher training institutions; i.e. it is so ingrained in our consciousness that we never question its cogency in our profession. In fact, two of the handbooks I reviewed as part of my research (Wittrock, 1986; Houston et al., 1990) concentrate on little else. Even at a time when there is considerable interest in listening to and learning from teachers stories, we are experiencing what Goodson (1997) refers to as one of the "paradoxes of postmodernism" in that "at precisely the time the teacher's voice is being pursued and promoted, the teacher's work is being technised and narrowed" [p.111].

Bruner (1986) has suggested that it is time research into teaching shifted from the logicoscientific or paradigmatic mode of cognitive functioning to one of narrative understanding. This would move us away from the search for universal truths and towards the goal of making connections between human events. These universal truths, according to Doyle (1997), have been used by school officials and policy makers to operate teaching by remote control, ignoring the fact that teaching, as Carter (1995) has argued, is largely a local event with "particularistic features that seem to defy both universalistic understandings and extrinsic regulation" [p. 93]. Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (1990) have concluded that knowledge transmission has failed as a model of teacher education, while inquiry approaches to teachers' learning across the lifespan are very "promising for meeting the changing needs of an increasingly diverse society" [p. 22]. Goodson (1993) accuses schools of education as having entered into "a devil's bargain" in order to gain acceptance and credibility in the university community of academic scholarship. He agrees with Clifford and Guthrie's assertion that schools of education

> **have become ensnared improvidently in the academic and political cultures of their institutions and have neglected their professional allegiances. They are like marginal men, aliens in their own worlds. They have seldom succeeded in satisfying the scholarly norms of their campus letters and science colleagues, and they are simultaneously estranged from their practising professional peers. The more forcefully they have rowed toward the shores of scholarly research, the more distant they have become from the public schools they are duty bound to serve. [p. 3-4]**

Goodson and others (Clark and Lampert, 1985; Carter, 1990; Cochrane-Smith and Lytle, 1992) have stressed the need to give teachers a central role in researching their own 'story'. Joseph and Burnaford (1994) believe that "Teachers themselves educate us about their work and, as we have found, reveal much about American culture through their reflections about families, children, or society" [p. 4]. In other words, teaching is a very personal business and cannot be separated from the professional part of life. As Eleanor Duckworth, in conversation with Anne Meek (1991) has stated, "The main thing wrong with education is that there's one group of people who do it - the teachers - and there's one group who think they know all about it - the researchers. The group who think they know about teaching try to find out more about it in order to tell the teachers about teaching - and that is total reversal" [p. 34].

While it is clear that in educational research there has been a major shift in emphasis from teacher practice to teacher knowledge (Feiman-Nemser and Floden, 1986; Carlgren and Lindblad, 1991), some researchers advise against its unqualified acceptance. Both Stones (1990) and Berliner (1986) have expressed concern over the highly localized and idiosyncratic nature of teacher knowledge and felt there was still a need to develop a commonly held set of principles and practices. Harvey (1989), warns of the "tyranny of the local" where general patterns, social contexts and critical theories are replaced by local stories and personal anecdotes [p. 90]. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1998) point out the "paradox" of teacher research in that it is in danger of becoming anything and everything, which can often in the end lead to nothing of consequence or power [p. 21]. Carter (1993) cautions against taking an "extreme view" of the exclusivity of teacher's voice and thus endowing their stories "with an authenticity that is unwarranted" [p. 8]. Tripp (1994) has suggested that 'critical incidents' rather than life history should be used when studying teachers because these will allow the researcher to identify specific teaching practices. Elbaz (1991) has noted that teachers are not privileged authors who somehow have direct access to truth or access to the 'whole' story. She believes that part of what has gone on in the past is unavailable, and in our quest for narrative unity we must be careful not to see unity before we look just because we have posited it exists [p. 5].

Despite the reservations of some researchers, there is little doubt that a major paradigm shift away from the theory to practice model is underway in teacher education research. Kelchtermans (1997) sums it up nicely by stating that narrative approaches in teaching move beyond the linearity and rationality of technological views of teaching, a move "which restores the judgment of a situation by a teacher as an all essential process of teaching" [p. 125].

Nevertheless, if the teachers themselves do possess 'truths' about teaching, it is important for us to understand the nature of that 'truth' in the epistemological sense of that word.

2.2 The Nature of Teacher Knowledge

As Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) have pointed out, teachers have not been seen historically as possessing unique professional knowledge or expertise. Lightfoot (1983) has commented that despite the rapid transformation of our society and the development of new cultural priorities and norms, "the images and expectations of teachers seems strangely anachronistic and one-dimensional" [p. 241]. The prevailing view among most researchers is that teachers have experience while academics have knowledge. Even after two decades of research into the nature of what it is that teachers 'know', there is still major disagreement over the nature of this knowledge.

In one of the most comprehensive reviews of the literature, Gary Fenstermacher (1994) stated that he wished to contrast "the literature on the knowledge that teachers generate as a result of their experience to the knowledge of teaching that is generated by those who specialize in research on teaching" [p. 3]. In other words, he was interested in what *researchers* say they know about teaching and what a different group of researchers say *teachers* know about teaching. Fenstermacher divided the majority of the research literature in this field into two categories:

1. **Formal** knowledge based on scientific research that addresses the question:
   What is known about effective teaching? **(TK-F)**

> **Researchers in this category do not see themselves as studying teacher knowledge so much as they perceive themselves producing knowledge about teaching. Using methods and designs found in the social sciences, they seek the determinants of good (successful or effective) teaching. Their work rests on a belief that if their methods and designs are in accord with accepted scientific theory and practice, their results may safely be accepted as knowledge about teachers and teaching [p. 7].**

2. **Practical** knowledge which is experientially based and asks the question:

   What do teachers know? **(TK-P)**

> **This question arises in the case of researchers who want to know what teachers already know, in contrast to producing knowledge for teachers to use. A critical presupposition of research in this category is that teachers know a great deal as a result of their training and experience [p. 9].**

Fenstermacher maintains that some teacher knowledge research does not quite fit into one or the other of these categories. He identifies Shulman's (1987) work on *pedagogical content knowledge* as different from other forms of practical knowledge in that it is " tilted more toward informing than illuminating classroom practice" [p. 15]. Grimmett and McKinnon (1992), in their review of Shulman's work, identified this knowledge as being "epistemologically different" and felt it was more analogous to "a craft conception of teaching than to one of teaching as an applied science" [p. 387]. Gudmundsdottir (1995) considered Shulman's pedagogical content knowledge to be "home made", developed on the job by teachers [p. 35], while Pendlebury (1993) relates the idea of a teacher's practical reasoning to the perceptual awareness of the experienced teacher - the *phronesis* described by Aristotle that was discussed in the previous chapter.

The very fact that so many researchers have had difficulty in defining teacher knowledge is indicative of the complexity of this concept. According to Fenstermacher (Ibid.), the problem arises when researchers focus on the knowledge that teachers already possess, as opposed to concentrating on the production of knowledge for teachers to use. He had difficulty, for example, categorizing the work of Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990), who defined their research as systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers. Their concern was with "the questions teachers ask, and the interpretive frames that teachers use to understand and improve their own classroom practices" [p. 4]. Fenstermacher saw their work as an outgrowth of the action research movement and related to

Schön's (1987) inquiries into reflective practice. He is critical of both their "enthusiasm" for teacher researchers and their implied suggestion that "university researchers should pack their bags" [p. 12]. In a later article, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1998) respond to Fenstermacher by suggesting that

> **Critiques like Fenstermacher's and Huberman's are strangely familiar. What is happening is what has so often happened when new voices and modes of discourse push their way into existing conversations about ways of knowing. Those located squarely inside the dominant epistemological and methodological paradigms use established terms, conventions, standards and definitions to evaluate, and essentially dismiss, alternative ones. [p. 27]**

One of the difficulties I have with Fenstermacher and other reviewers of teacher knowledge is their tendency to dichotomize the research. Fenstermacher himself admits that the problem with categorizing Shulman's work, for example, "may be as much a result of my categories for analysis as it is of Shulman's conceptions of teaching" [ibid. p. 16]. It seems that the positivist view of a polarized universe predominates with many qualitative researchers as they try to classify teacher knowledge into one category or another. To illustrate this pedagogical dualism, I offer the following table:

Theory to practice	***Researcher***	***Practice to theory***
Formal	Fenstermacher	**Practical**
process-product	Behar-Horenstein	**sociolinguistic**
Propositional	Fenstermacher	**Performance**
technical rationalism	Schön	**knowing-in-action**
knowing-that	Ryle	**knowing-how**
Paradigmatic mode	Bruner	**narrative mode**
traditional	various researchers	**progressive**
masculine/objectivist	Keller	**female/subjectivist**

Table 1: Traditional Views of Education - Pedagogical Dualism

It is my contention that the search for dichotomous relationships or polarized frameworks for qualitative research data in particular is a legacy from Science. Many current researchers in the field of teacher education possess a strong quantitative background and are troubled by the lack of reverence for the "holy trinity" of validity, reliability and generalizability. Johnson (cited in Fenstermacher, 1994), in rejecting Ryle's (1949) dichotomy between "knowing that" and "knowing how", states that "No good has come from the alleged crucial epistemological distinction, which has served only to give us a picture of ourselves as cognitively fragmented and which has reinforced the ill-conceived theory-practice dichotomy" [1989, p. 365]. Janesick (1994) is another who has questioned the value of the 'trinity' to qualitative studies. She has coined the term "methodolatry", a combination of method and idolatry, to describe "a preoccupation with selecting and defending methods to the exclusion of the story being told" [p. 215]. Doyle (1997) is also critical of the requirement demanded by epistemologists that narrative conclusions must be "tested" or "warranted". Although he admits that research has shown that some teachers are better than others, he is concerned that "the focus on precise measurement of specific behaviors and the use of controlled conditions to verify scientific laws [may] squeeze the life out of teaching and silence the voices of those who know most about the teaching phenomena, namely, teachers themselves" [p. 94].

2.3 Practical Knowledge, Teaching and Story

Grimmett and MacKinnon, in their 1992 review of teacher knowledge, use the term *craft knowledge* to characterize teacher thought derived from considerable experience in the practice setting and formed over time in the minds of teachers through reflection.

> **Craft knowledge of teaching is not substantive, subject matter knowledge...It is a particular form of morally appropriate intelligent and sensible know-how that is constructed by teachers...it is the glue that brings all the knowledge bases to bear on the act of teaching. [p. 386-7]**

Grimmett and MacKinnon see craft knowledge as an adjunct to theoretically based teacher knowledge. In telling the story of Eleazar Hull, a New England sea captain renowned for his navigational skills, they make the point that Hull's 'craft' knowledge of sailing based on his many years of experience helped him to make better decisions than those based on scientific principles alone. Thus teacher "knowing-how" gained through the experience of doing can be enhanced by the application of theoretical teacher knowledge gained through research. In other words, learning to teach is not so much the application of theory to practice as it is a matter of integrating the "knowing what" with our direct experience. Nevertheless, they conclude that

> **In the final analysis, the essential validity and morality of craft knowledge resides in readers 'living' the life of particular teachers through stories, narrative, case studies and other forms of vicarious experience. [p. 396]**

As Elbaz (1991) has pointed out, some researchers use narrative or story as a way to present "data that [are] rich and voluminous and would otherwise be difficult to display" [p. 3]. Elbaz sees teacher knowledge as a specific integration of certain understandings that will address a particular need. Although some investigators regard the narrative as illustrative of some point about teaching, Elbaz and a few other researchers (Butt and Raymond, 1986; Carter, 1995) regard story as the very essence of their work.

Clandinin and Connelly (1990) state that experience is the starting point for all social inquiry. We share our experience with others by telling stories. "One learns about education from thinking about life, and one learns about life from thinking about education" [p. 415]. Passerini (cited in Goodson, 1995) contends that we narrate our stories according to a "prior script... drawing on pre-existing story lines and ways of telling stories, [that] are in part modified by circumstances" [p.28]. Ben-Peretz (1995) also acknowledges the importance of "recipes" or scripts to teachers - in both coding and re-utilizing their gained experience [p. 63]. Connelly and Clandinin (1994) talk about these important life events as 'awakenings' - the realization that they are "authoring [their] own experience" [p. 157]. However, in the case of the retired teachers included in my study, I would consider the term "revelation" as more appropriate.

2.4 The Life Stories of Teachers

As I have already indicated, the lack of voice for teachers was a major impetus in the shift towards research in the narrative paradigm, which looks for particular connections between events. As Gudmundsdottir (1995) has explained, teachers are already familiar with the use of stories. They use them to help their students interpret the world. Thus,

> **When researchers offer themselves to teachers as sympathetic listeners, they can learn from teachers about who they are, what they know, and their world in the classroom. As researchers probe and guide with their questions, the teachers' stories inevitably become a joint production. This process is a dynamic one. Past experiences are not buried in the ground like archeological treasures waiting to be recovered and studied. Rather, the past is recreated through telling [p. 3].**

Carter (1995) believes that story is particularly well suited to exploring issues in teaching and teacher education because they are concerned not so much with "universals" but rather "local" matters [p. 326]. Elbaz (1991) claims that story is "the very stuff of teaching, the landscape within which we live as teachers and researchers, and within which the work of teachers can be seen as making sense" [p. 3]. In his article, "Research Currents: Life as Narrative," Bruner (1987) makes a similar statement:

> **I believe that the ways of telling and the ways of conceptualizing that go with them become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but directing it into the future. I have argued that a life as led is inseparable from a life as told—or more bluntly, a life is not "how it was" but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted: told and retold. [p. 573]**

As we listen to teachers talk about their work, we can see in their stories a framework for their own knowledge as well as a vehicle for communicating this knowledge to others. Sparks-Langer (1992) suggests that the whole emphasis on critical and narrative teacher reflection could be seen as the "bridge" into a new way of thinking about research on teaching. She believes that even those trained in the quantitative/experimental research tradition "are now truly listening and learning from teachers' stories" [p. 152].

Given the fact that the majority of the current investigators in teacher education were weaned on the scientific model of inquiry, it is perhaps not surprising to find many of them struggling to find a middle ground between quantitative and qualitative research models of inquiry. Carlgren and Lindblad (1991) maintain that as teachers are central actors in teaching, it is important for those researching this field to produce credible results. Teachers are now recognizing the importance of their own, experience-based knowledge, and can see the value of a transition from "studying the relation between teachers' thinking and acting to studying teachers' actions as expressions of teacher thinking" [p. 510].

Although many regard the research emphasis on narrative as a post-modernist precept, story as a teaching and learning tool has been used since the dawn of humankind. In primitive societies, the storyteller assured the survival of the tribe by transmitting orally the skills and traditions from one generation to the next. In addition, oral histories gave the tribe a sense of community and belonging which in turn brought purpose to their existence. As teachers, our sharing of stories helps us to continuously re-invent ourselves as professionals, confident in the knowledge we have gained and pleased by the opportunity to pass it on. We can connect and learn from one another as we discover common meaning and new understanding from our retelling of the events that shape our daily lives in classrooms with children. As Valerie Polakow has said,

> **Understanding human experience is the central task of the educational researcher. For it is the stories of everyday lives, the drama, the meanings, the metaphors others live by, that the human science researcher must practice his or her craft of telling [1985, p. 833].**

However, Raymond and Suprenant (1988) have stated that it is not enough to provide "experiential links" between a teacher's personal and professional lives. They suggest that we need to regard teacher knowledge as a formative process, which necessitates an examination of how that knowledge evolved and changed during their career [p. 2]. In other words, to gain a full understanding of how a teacher learned to teach, it is necessary to consider the full life history of that individual.

2.5 The Life History Approach to Studying Teachers' Lives

It is generally accepted in the associated literature that Thomas and Znaniecki (1920) conducted the first comprehensive life history on the Polish peasant in Europe and America. Although the recreation of life stories by biographical and autobiographical means is an ancient literary pastime, the idea of constructing a set of explanations that reflect one person's or group's subjective experiences toward a pre-determined set of events is a more recent phenomenon (Armstrong, 1987). While the terms "life story" and "life history" are sometimes used interchangeably, most educational researchers believe they are very different constructs. Ivor Goodson, for example, defines life *story* as the story we tell about our life, whereas life *history* is a shared adventure where the life story teller and others collaborate. He argues that

> **We need to move from life stories to life histories, from narratives to genealogies of context, towards a modality that embraces *stories of action within stories of context.* In so doing, stories can be "located," seen as the social constructions they are, fully impregnated by their location within power structures and social milieux. [1995, p. 98]**

Cole (1994) suggests that life history allows us to deepen our understanding of life lived in the present by studying our personal, institutional and social past. "Life history," she claims, "demand[s] that stories and chapters of a life be reopened, reexamined and retold" [p. 7]. Kelleher (1999) agrees, suggesting that "life histories of teachers help curriculum researchers (including teachers) fill in the gaps and silences in existing theories of curriculum and teaching" [p. 9]. Woods (1984) has taken the position that collaborating with an individual, as he did with 'Tom' permits us "to give more consideration to this whole life perspective" and helps to do "full justice" to their story [p. 260].

Middleton (1997b) believes that life history research has been most thoroughly developed in women's studies, a field in which 'experience' as an object of study, and in-depth interviewing as a methodology have been central [p. 2]. She contends that educational studies which are based on "official records" and the writings of what educational policy-makers and teacher-educators were thinking has resulted in what she refers to as a view from the top.

These views tell us little "about the educational ideas and practices of 'ordinary' teachers" [1996, p. 544].

Barbara Myerhoff (1980) feels life histories can make people visible. This was a vitally important concept in her research into the lives of Jewish survivors of the holocaust. She found that with her subjects, a crisis situation had conspired to make their group acutely self-conscious, creating a need for them to provide both definitions of themselves and explanations for their destiny, past and future. Goodson (1992) expresses concern that the literature on the personal, biographical and historical aspects of teaching is underdeveloped and should be expanded in order to "re-assert the importance of the teacher, of knowing the teacher, of listening to the teacher, and of speaking with the teacher" [p. 234]. He also regards examining teachers' work in the context of a teacher's life as being a far less intrusive process than classroom observation:

> **I wish to argue that to place the teachers' classroom practice at the centre of the action for action-researchers is to put the most exposed and problematic aspect of the teachers' world at the centre of scrutiny and negotiation...particularly if the wish is to ultimately seek reflection about and change in the teacher's practice. [p.9]**

Raymond and Suprenant (1988), on the other hand, argue for an approach "whereby a biographical rendition of a teacher's knowledge would be grounded in a construction of present teaching practice, based on ethnographic data" [p. 4]. This approach, when combined with a collaborative effort in the reconstruction of the teacher biography, has the potential to empower and emancipate teachers and teaching practices [Butt and Raymond, 1989, p. 10].

2.6 Are There Patterns in a Teaching Career?

Many of the more comprehensive life history studies undertaken overlap with the research on teacher career cycles or patterns (Sikes et al., 1985; Ball and Goodson, 1985; Huberman, 1989a; Fessler and Christensen, 1993; McAllen, 1992). While developing the format for my dissertation, I seriously considered using career cycles as a presentation model. As Cruickshank et al. (1986) have commented, teacher development is "the new kid on the block", and there is no shortage of models available. However, in reviewing the research done in this area, I found little agreement on the proposed stages in the life of a teacher.

I began my review of the existing literature with the pioneering work done by Howard Becker in 1952 involving a group of sixty Chicago teachers. Becker was interested in the "horizontal" nature of teaching careers and the fact that teachers who wanted to advance in education could only do so by leaving the classroom. He concluded that many teachers did not pursue a "vertical" career path because they might end up in a less desirable school environment [p. 471]. Indeed, in the Chicago system, a fledgling administrator was almost certain to be assigned to one of the more challenging schools in the city. I discovered similar motivations for 'staying put' in at least three of the teachers in my own study, and several teachers expressed anger at being 'forced' to change schools late in their respective careers.

Although most researchers agree that teachers' professional lives took them through a series of transitions or *passages* (Sheehy, 1976), there is little concurrence on the number of stages or the precise order in which they would be experienced. Many studies were also highly specific, with small sample size or gender bias (e.g. Levinson et al., 1979; Newman, 1979).

A good example of how problematic these theoretical constructs can be is Fessler and Christensen's (1993) Teacher Career Cycle Model. Although each of the eight career phases is clearly identified, Casey (cited in Hunter-Pirtle, 1998) has demonstrated that it is possible for teachers to skip from the "growing" stage right into the "induction" stage simply by moving to a new school [p. 10]. Moreover, they could be expected to move into the "frustrated" stage at any time if subjected to personal or organizational pressures. Sikes et al. (1985) studied twenty-four men and twenty-four women with various levels of teaching experience and after constructing their life histories, concluded that teachers went through several critical *transitions* at different phases in their career (e.g., the "settling down" phase which occurs between ages 30 and 40.) Again, they report "variations" in this model as "tumultuous times" can increase the frequency of these transitions and necessitate a 'speeding up' of the maturation process.

Huberman (1989a) gave up entirely on the idea of a linear model and describes instead a series of paths or options that inevitably lead to either a "bitter" or "serene" conclusion [p. 3]. Regrettably, I found myself no wiser after reviewing more than twenty studies on the question of changes, cycles and stages in the life of a teacher. I was also in agreement with Floden's conclusion that

> **Though much may be gained from a developmental theory of teacher change, such a theory does not exist. Existing attempts either stop short of linking developmental theory to teacher change or describe teacher change without providing an encompassing theory. [1981, p.3]**

As a result, I decided that it would be more appropriate to concentrate on the unique natures of the careers of the ten retired teachers in my study than to search for commonalties in their personal and professional life development. Although some reference is made in Chapter Six to career phases and transitions, an existing model of career cycles was not used as a research framework in this study.

2.7 Research on the Life Histories of Retired Teachers

Finding research that focused primarily on retired teachers was a difficult task. Several of the more significant studies on the lives of teachers do include retired teachers as part of their sample (Sikes et al., 1985; Myklebust, 1998; Huberman, 1989a), but all of these studies focus on life cycles and stage theory as previously discussed. However, the studies cited in this final part of the literature review have utilized retired teachers as either a significant component or principal focus of their research.

Middleton and May (1997a) recently published the results of their study of teaching in New Zealand from 1915 to 1995. They completed life history interviews with 150 New Zealand teachers and former teachers who ranged in age from 21 to their mid-90s. The study utilizes what the authors describe as a "cross-sector approach" in order to illustrate "how historical events, political ideals, social movements and new teaching methods wash through all dimensions of the education system and how they have been invented, introduced, taken up, subverted, or resisted to different degrees and in different ways within and across the sectors" [1997b, p. 2]. Their purpose was to represent teachers not as passive recipients of the latest administrative mandates but as "creative strategists whose theories in practice are products of their own agency" [ibid., p. 2]. Given my stated intention to study the lives of regular classroom teachers, I was particularly pleased to note the following comment by these researchers:

> **It was these 'ordinary' stories we particularly wanted to hear because the history books tend to emphasise the voices of educational leaders. [p. 4]**

In a study related to the one conducted by Sikes et al. (1985) and referred to earlier in this review, Woods (1984) researched the career of "Tom", a retired British Secondary Art teacher. Woods interviewed Tom for over twelve hours, generating five hundred pages of transcript. He was interested in reconstructing Tom's total life and career, in an attempt "to try and identify some of the major strands of development of self, and the important influences upon it" [p. 239]. Woods concluded that 'Tom the artist' had been sacrificed in order to sustain a life as 'Tom, the teacher', and that Tom's life history reveals a series of "trade-offs, gains and losses" over the course of his career [p. 259].

In Israel, Ben-Peretz (1995) studied the lives of forty-three retired teachers to explore the nature of teachers' memories and how they transformed concrete experiences into practical wisdom.

> **We assumed that retired teachers had reached the peak of their professional knowledge and had gained insight into the process of becoming experts at their craft. Retired teachers could look back over many years of practice, and their choices of past events provided a view of changing education situations. [p. 3]**

Ben-Peretz' work was instrumental in drawing my attention to the role memory plays in reconstructing one's life story. She looked at the nature of teachers' memories, the structure of their narratives and both the context and content of the remembered events. Her results indicate that as teachers we gain pedagogical insight by looking back at our own teaching and personal experiences and accomplishments [p. 122]. Ben-Peretz found in her research that teachers seemed in general to be quite satisfied with their careers yet remembered negative experiences over positive ones by a ratio of 3:1. The nature of the memories of the teachers in my study will be compared to these results in Chapter Eight.

In my opening chapter, I made reference to research conducted by David Hobson (1994) at National-Louis University. As part of their Masters in Education program, Hobson had thirty-two of his students who were mid-career teachers interview an equal number of retired colleagues, focusing on the question, "What does it mean to be a teacher?" All except two of the interviewers and interviewees were women, and all were from white, suburban, middle class backgrounds. The contemporary teachers were intrigued by the images of teaching created by their retired colleagues and were amazed at how in some areas (e.g., non-teaching tasks), the complaints remained the same. After reflecting both on the interview texts and subsequent discussion generated by the experience, Hobson concluded that

> **Teachers live professional lives largely apart from one another in separate rooms, separate buildings, separate districts. There is a certain irony in this as so many come to teaching with a perception of the family, of belonging, of filling the image of the caring helper. Instead, many wind up feeling isolated, cut off from the children and each other. [p. 93]**

Hobson raises a question in his research contemplated as well by Weiler (1992) in her study of fifteen retired women teachers in California; i.e., How much choice did women really have in choosing teaching as a profession? Weiler reported on the "bad fit" between the teachers' memories of their own 'free' decisions and the restrictions and limitations on women's roles and work revealed through other historical sources. In her summary, Weiler claims that the commonly held notion that women select teaching "as a means of expressing essentially womanly natures" needs to be revisited and that we need to consider "how gender constructs have shaped assumptions of who is the teacher, who is the principal, and who has the authority to define the world" [p. 49].

Casey (1992, 1993) has also studied the lives of retired women teachers through the lens of the feminist revisionist scholar. Her work has focused on the need to correct earlier stereotypes of women teachers and to emphasize the critical role they played in the economic, social and intellectual developments of the first half of this century. Casey has expressed particular concern over the failure of the literature to deal with the issue of antagonism between teachers and administrators. However, in sharp contrast to the findings of Weiler, she also concludes that the women interviewed in her study "work for children, not for those who pay their wages' and that their narratives reveal an "ethos of nurturance and growth" [p.206].

In a similar study, Margaret Nelson (1992) conducted interviews with approximately fifty women teachers who taught in Vermont prior to 1950. She shares Casey's concern about the ways the careers of these rural schoolteachers had been portrayed in the published materials available. Their stories, she felt, were hidden because important information had been "overlooked, consciously avoided or distorted." While recognizing the value of interviewing the teachers themselves, she acknowledges that

> **... oral history can also lead us astray. The method is notoriously bad for giving us an overview or accurate sequence of events. Moreover, there may be problems in the interview process itself, particularly when respondents are asked to remember things that happened a long time ago. [p. 185]**

An in-depth study by Greene and Manke (1994) examined the lives of six white and six black retired Chicago and Milwaukee area teachers and identified three themes that appeared in almost all the interviews: 1) dedication to teaching, 2) the intrinsic rewards of the profession, and 3) the financial awards of teaching. The researchers felt the three themes were interrelated in that "The greater one's dedication to teaching, the greater one's intrinsic rewards from it" [p. 101]. George and Schaer (1986) were also concerned with the views of education held by retired teachers and surveyed a group comprised of one hundred retired and one hundred active teachers attending a professional conference in the Southeastern United States. They found that retired or nonactive teachers viewed many of the current issues in education more critically than the practising teachers [p. 4].

Another pre-1980 study involving retired teachers was conducted by Anne Peterson in 1978 for her doctoral dissertation at Ohio State University. In her introduction, Peterson commented that "One of the most astonishing research gaps in the field of education today is the lack of studies which provide information about the career teacher" [p. 2]. I was able to contact this researcher by email to gain her impressions twenty-one years later. In response to a question about differences she may have observed between male and female teachers, she replied:

> **I did not find my female teachers eager to retire, but many of the males had built successful sideline businesses and simply "retired" to those. I am now close to retirement myself and looking forward to it... I continue to believe that life stage analysis is the best way to track outlooks towards occupational and personal development. I do know that I see things differently as a result of being older than I did when I wrote the dissertation! (Personal communication by email, June 29, 1999.)**

In addition to Peterson's work, several studies have been completed on the life histories of retired teachers in the Mid-Western United States. Duling (1993) has chronicled the stories of fourteen teachers - twelve women and two men - who taught in Southeastern Ohio in one-room schoolhouses. Although her dissertation focused on the lives of teachers prior to World War II, Duling's research was of particular interest to me as she explored the historical context of teaching from a rural versus urban perspective.

Manning (1990) also researched the lives of the one-room schoolteachers. Starting from a pool of fifty retired educators, she narrowed her research down to eight teachers - including an African-American married couple - who had started teaching in one room schools in rural Texas. Her findings were consistent with those of Green and Manke and Casey (cited earlier) in that "although none of the teachers spoke directly of the spiritual quality attached to their profession, their words implied that they felt they had answered a higher calling" [p. 182]

Cordier, (1992) has written about the lives of five retired teachers who taught in the earlier part of this century in Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas, although only one story is actually based on oral history. Although lacking direct evidence, Cordier surmised that despite physical hardships, isolation and an almost complete lack of resources, the children in these schools received an appropriate basic education. As the majority of my research participants were either students or teachers in similar one-room rural schools, I was interested in comparing the mid-western American experience to the one here in Alberta.

In Canada, research on retired teachers as a distinct entity is almost non-existent. Despite a thorough search of ERIC, Dissertations Abstracts and the Internet, I was only able to locate two studies completed on retired teachers in Canada. One of these was a statistically based report on career span development completed by Michael Kompf in 1991, which I outlined in Chapter One. I have been in personal contact with Kompf and he has continued his interest in the lives of teachers after retirement. In a recent email response to a question about "looking back" on a life of teaching, Kompf indicated he was discussing with Michael Huberman (University of Geneva) the use of an approach he developed called LifeMapping to look at the latter stages of development and transition for teachers to retirement. He also lamented the lack of interest in the lives of retired teachers:

> **It seems that once gone... you're gone. No debriefing, no psych or lifestyle adjustment... just gone. It's really quite sad because of the expertise and the bitter disengagement most seem to experience. [Personal email communication, 1999 06 16]**

The other study was a project conducted at the University of Saskatchewan by Edwin Ralph in 1994. Ralph invited 43 retired educators to give professional advice to beginning teachers and offer suggestions to a College of Education as to how they might enhance their preservice teacher education program. Ralph regarded the insights gained from this endeavour to be a "win-win" situation and concluded that "It is therefore time that we as teacher educators formalize ways to appropriate this professional wisdom of our retired colleagues from all levels and fields in the educational enterprise" [p.71]. I was also successful in contacting Dr. Ralph by email and asked him whether he had continued his research in this area. His response:

> **I think your interest and work on retired educators is not only important, but it may prove valuable as the general population increases in age...Unfortunately, I have not done further work on this topic; plus, like yourself, I found very little literature related to it. I would like, however, to offer you moral support to pursue this subject-- and help begin to fill in the research gap that exists. [Personal email, 1999 07 26]**

All of these studies of retired teachers raised issues that I needed to consider in my own research. I felt it was important to include both men and women in my study, and to explore the administrator/teacher relationship and the impact it had on their careers. I was fortunate to locate men and women teachers who had both accepted and rejected the opportunity to pursue educational administration as a career. I also decided to include questions during the interview process that would encourage my research participants to identify their reasons for selecting teaching as a profession.

After completing my review of the literature, I was convinced that there was a definite need for additional research into the life histories of retired teachers. My survey of existing research in this area revealed a number of common issues, including questions about the role of memory in reconstructing one's professional life, the impact of gender on career decisions, and how we react to change and innovation as our careers draw to a close. I had also discovered several studies that touched upon my fundamental questions of how both our childhood and professional experiences shape and influence the way we teach.

Recess at Narrow Lake School (Pauline Hahn's third placement) in 1951. Note the woodpile and the "little house" in the background.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?
W.B. Yeats, *Among School Children*

The model chosen for my research was taken from Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) which suggests approaching life history research in three phases:

- Preliminary Issues
- Data Collection
- Analysis, Explanation and Presentation

I have used this framework to describe the procedure followed in conducting my research.

3.1 Preliminary Issues

This was one of the most difficult chapters to complete in my dissertation. As I have already mentioned, all of my previous work in educational research was completed in the quantitative paradigm. As I transcribed and analyzed the text from the teacher interviews, I found myself wondering whether the stories they were sharing with me were "true" in the sense that they represented the events in their lives as they had actually occurred. As I re-constructed the personal and professional lives of these former educators, I wondered to what extent their stories would be censored by what Matlin and Stang (1978) have referred to as "the Polyanna Principle", in which only positive and successful experiences are recalled. It was at this point that my own autobiography re-entered the conversation.

3.1.1 Picking Berries

There are two memorable occasions in my life which involve blackberry picking. The first was on Northern Vancouver Island when I suddenly realized that my 'co-worker' on the other side of the bush was a black bear. (We mutually resolved that predicament by retreating rapidly in opposite directions.) The second was a more lasting encounter that occurred while living in a rented home in West Vancouver. The neighbour gathering berries on the other side of the fence turned out to be the novelist, James Clavell.

After brief introductions, our conversation turned naturally to writing. I had read his novels *Shogun* and *Taipan* with a great deal of pleasure but was puzzled about one aspect of his work. I asked the author how the reader of his books was supposed to separate fact from fiction. Clavell paused in his picking and replied

> **I'm not sure that you can, or that it really matters if you do. When I'm researching historical documents and other official records, I assume much of it is fiction. I leave it up to my readers to do the same thing. To me, sorting it out is part of the fun. (Personal conversation, August, 1968)**

As I reflected on Clavell's words, I realized that in my approach to research, I was still fleeing the 'black bear' of quantitative research. There was an inherent lack of trust in the significance of my own research in the sense that I would be making any real contribution to our understanding of how teachers learn to teach. I was having difficulty in making a connection between the wonderful life stories shared by my informants and the need to provide my readers with important insight into teaching based on 'hard' data.

Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) have suggested that what is missing from positivistic explanations offered by quantitative researchers is a demonstration of how the action in question is accounted for and explained by the person or persons involved. They believe that a social world like teaching "needs to be investigated in terms of meanings and actions rather than causes and effects" [p. 24]. According to Ary et al., (1990) the role of the researcher in qualitative inquiry is to present the information as accurately as possible, serving both as "data gathering instrument" and "inductive analyst." As I interviewed each of the retired teachers in my study, I tried to keep in mind that my fundamental task was to help them reconstruct their individual stories so that we would both gain new insight through its telling. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has characterized this collaborative approach as " an ethnographic experiment with polyvocal texts" [cited in Mullen, 1992]. As co-researcher into their life history, I needed to understand not only the significance of the story being told but the context in which it originally occurred.

Butt et al. (1986) regard the qualitative study of teachers to be "emancipatory" in that it has the potential to provide teachers with " the power to transcend their present situation and take control of their own lives" [p. 9]. Even though my research participants were no longer teaching, their stories provided them with an opportunity for new growth and understanding. However, to reach this new understanding would require them to be both frank and comprehensive in the retelling of their life histories. In other words, much of the responsibility for the accurate recording of these life stories would lie with the participants themselves. Nevertheless, this still left the question about the responsibility of the researcher to the reader in the qualitative paradigm.

In *The Good Preschool Teacher*, William Ayers contends that any attempt by people to verbalize their experience results in a kind of fiction.

> **This is why every work requires a reader who...releases the truth of a work by choosing what piece to look at, what truth to seek...The reader lets the work speak, and must be present to the work in order to co-create its truth or falsity. [1989, p. 17]**

In the final analysis, it is up to the reader, assisted by the author, to make the necessary connections between the stories of the lives of the research participants and their own understanding of teacher knowledge. As Goodson (1992) explains, in this type of collaborative inquiry

> **The teacher becomes less a teller of stories and more of a general investigator; the external researcher is more than a listener and elicitor of stories and is actively involved in textual and contextual construction... In the end, the teacher researcher can collaborate in investigating not only the stories of lives but also the contexts of lives. Such collaboration should provide new understandings for all of us concerned with the world of schooling. [p. 244]**

3.1.2 What's in a Name?

Given the nature of qualitative research, it is not too surprising that there is no consensus on what to call the research into teachers' life stories. In reviewing the studies completed in this area, I discovered a plethora of terms to describe it. Those who place the greatest emphasis on the importance of 'story' have used terms such as "case story" (Manke, 1995), "personal narratives" (Borland, 1991), "narrative inquiry" (Clandinin, 1986), "personal life stories" (Carter, 1995), "teacher portraits" and "life narratives" (Ayers, 1989). Others have stressed the historical-biographical connection and have called their work "personal history" ((Knowles and Holt-Reynolds, 1991) "biographic inquiry" (Butt et al., 1992), "personal biography" (Munro, 1987), "oral history" (Nelson, 1992; Weiler, 1992), "life cycle" (Huberman, 1989a) and "life review" (Kompf, 1991).

However, the term I felt best described my own research method was "life history" (Lightfoot, 1983; Casey,1993; Hunter-Pirtle, 1998). Goodson (1992) also favoured the phrase "life history" as he felt the term "life story" was inadequate in defining research into the lives of teachers:

> **The distinction between the life story and the life history is ... absolutely basic. The life story is the 'story we tell about our life'; the life history is a collaborative venture, reviewing a wider range of evidence. The life story teller and another (or others) collaborate in developing this wider account by interviews and discussions and by scrutiny of texts and contexts. The life history is the life story located within its historical context. [p. 6]**

Middleton and May (1997a) have also used life history to characterize their research methodology. They believe that this approach allows teachers to be viewed "not as passive recipients of the ideas of policy-makers or the latest theoretical fashion, but as creative strategists whose theories-in-practice are products of their own agency" [p. 10].

Despite the differences in methodological nomenclature, many of the researchers studying the lives of teachers appear to have arrived at similar conclusions; i.e., authentic teachers' knowledge is grounded in the autobiographical story and novice teachers can learn a great deal from the collective wisdom of their more experienced colleagues (Butt et al., 1992; Elbaz, 1983; Cole, 1994; Alexander et al., 1992). In her recently completed doctoral dissertation, Kelleher (1999) cites a survey of life history and narrative researchers completed by Hatch and Wisniewski (1995). The purpose of the survey was to see if any distinction could be made between the terms "life history" and "narrative" [p. 11]. Kelleher reports that the respondents failed to agree on definitions for the two terms and concludes that she would have to agree with William Ayers' response to the survey in which he states that "both approaches to inquiry are unabashedly genre blurring. They tend to tear down walls - anthropology, sociology, history, linguistics - so why should we resurrect them?" [cited in Kelleher, p. 12].

3.1.3 A Question of Validity

Life history also includes elements of case study methodology (Merriam, 1988) in that it attempts to study an individual or individuals across an entire range of behaviours and to relate those behaviours to their history and environment. Both life history and case study research rely on depth as opposed to breadth and are particularly effective for studying the knowledge base of education. Life history also contains methodological similarities to ethnological research in that "doing ethnography", in Clifford Geertz' words, means "establishing rapport, selecting information, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, keeping a diary, and so on" (1973, p. 6]. However, 'true' ethnographic research in teacher education, i.e., the study of teachers at work in the field, was not possible in this case, as my research participants were all retired. I required some other method to validate my interview and story data.

I decided that "member checking" or respondent validation would be the primary method used in this investigation. Each of my research participants was asked to read over both the biographical and interpretive data from their life history included in the dissertation. I then met with each teacher to discuss any changes they wished to make before submission of the thesis.

A comment by Geertz on the need for "thick" description in qualitative research reminded me that I could use some of my other sources of life history data for triangulation. Denzin (1970), uses the phrase " between methods triangulation" to describe the use of more than one method of data collection within the same study for validation purposes. Denzin considers triangulation to be a fundamental principle of qualitative research and recommends that the investigator collect data from a variety of sources and then compare it for internal consistency.

Following this principle, I asked my ten retired teachers for any "artifacts" they might have from their teaching days that might provide insight into their professional lives. These artifacts or field texts included notebooks, diaries, photographs, inspector's reports, lesson plans and communications from students and parents. Several of the teachers expressed regret that much of the material had been thrown out as irrelevant to their lives today, or passed on to members of the family. It was certainly interesting to note what each teacher had chosen to save from the wealth of materials related to their careers.

For example:

- A note from a principal congratulating her on the handling of a difficult parent
- A porcelain "Scotty" dog which was a gift from a challenging student
- A record book of student teacher observations
- A letter from a Music Supervisor commenting on how much he enjoyed the performance of the class during a festival competition
- An oversized "get well" card signed by the entire class
- A pressed flower from her retirement dinner

Triangulation was also assisted by the written stories and personal chronologies elicited from each retired teacher, as in many cases they provided corroboration of the information gathered through interviews. Two of the teachers in my study also loaned me copies of their community histories that included information of their families and the schools they attended. The locally written texts were particularly useful in validating the early histories of the two research participants.

3.2 Collecting the Data

Constas, in a 1992 article published in the A.E.R.A. journal, has suggested that there is a need for greater openness in the presentation of qualitative research procedures. He believed that researchers needed to be forthright in their description of their own narrative, their research activities and their method construction [p. 256]. This sentiment was echoed by Ayers (1989), Doyle (1997) and Chenail (1999). I therefore decided to spend some time in this chapter describing the various activities undertaken in this study.

3.2.1 The Research Participants

The participants in my research are ten teachers, four men and six women, who graduated from the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta, spent their teaching careers in this province and are now retired. The Government of Alberta phased out its Normal Schools in Calgary, Camrose and Edmonton and turned over responsibility for the preparation of teachers to the University of Alberta in 1945. With one exception, all of the teachers included in this study received their training between 1945 and 1955 at the University of Alberta, placing them among the earliest teachers to be trained at this institution. I had originally selected eight teachers for my study - six women and two men - but the discovery late in the process of two men who had spent their entire careers in the classroom convinced me to add them to my sample. The one exception was Margaret, who attended Normal School in 1939. However, Margaret was so enthused about the project after our initial interview that I decided to include her in the sample. This sample, I believe, has given me enough informants to avoid what Spindler (1982) has called the "idioverse" or the idiosyncratic nature of the knowledge held by any one participant.

All ten teachers retired between 1979 and 1994 and ranged in age from 64 to 82 at the time of the interviews. Collectively, they represent over 350 years of teaching experience in more than fifty schools in twenty-one different jurisdictions. Six are married, three are widowed and one is divorced. All came from families with one or more siblings and all had at least one child of their own. Only two of the ten were themselves married to teachers and out of the twenty-eight children resulting from their marriages, only six went into teaching.

The teachers included in this study are introduced to the reader in Chapter Five of this dissertation through a short biographical sketch. Each teacher, when asked to participate in this research, was given the choice of anonymity or the use of their actual name. At the suggestion of my thesis advisor, I reviewed the literature on this topic to see what others had done in this regard. I discovered that several existing studies had used real names - or at least made it available as an option to their informants. Although some researchers (e.g., Bogdan and Biklen, 1982) believe it is important at all times to protect the identity of research participants, others involved in teacher narrative research have elected to use either participant's real names or first names only (Butt et al.,1992; Koerner, 1992). Middleton and May (1997b) report that they were "grateful" that many of their informants permitted them to use their real names because "it enables us to insert their lives, work and ideas into the history books" [p. 5]. Kelleher (1999), whose thesis involved the study of three of her colleagues, wrestled with this problem as well, and cites support from Plummer (1983) in her decision to use their real names because "those who know the participants will recognize them even when pseudonyms are used, and attempts to change details to prevent recognition makes nonsense of the goal of authenticity" [p. 24]. Although some might argue that the fact that their real identities would be known might cause participants to selectively 'edit' their histories, leaving out painful or controversial stories, it is equally possible that anonymous participants might inflate their narratives under the protection of a pseudonym.

After consulting with the other teachers and discovering to my surprise that they were all interested in having their real names used, I decided to let them make the final decision after their research profiles and my analysis of their life history was complete. If they were comfortable with the results after the member check process was finished, either their real names would be used or their real first names with surnames omitted (see Butt et al., 1992; Koerner,1992). In the end, all ten teachers decided they would prefer to use their real identities, although in some instances they have elected to change or delete certain names and geographical locations from the interview transcripts in order to protect the privacy of other individuals. Their decision to be identified by name in this thesis has also allowed me to use personal photographs supplied by the teachers to illustrate their life stories. Upon completion of the research, the interview audiotapes were returned to the participants along with the other borrowed artifacts. Thus the interview tapes have become part of their family history.

Here are the ten men and women who agreed to participate in my research:

Gerry Grover	Pauline Hahn
Alice Halvorsen	Jim Hunter
Thor Lerohl	Peggy Melmock
Glenn Munro	Anne Rasmussen
Margaret Shupe	Mary Wasylyk

The retired teachers included in my study were located by what Bogdan and Biklen (1982) refer to as "snowball sampling." In the spring of 1997, I made presentations on my intended research at two retired teacher luncheons in the Edmonton area. After listening to my proposal, four retirees who met my criteria expressed interest in the project. They, in turn knew of others who might be interested and after follow up conversations with the initial four teachers and a series of telephone interviews, I had my eight volunteers. Each of the teachers was given an introductory letter that included a brief explanation of the research and a formal invitation to participate. The letter also requested permission to use " any journals, diaries, letters or other personal artifacts you may have kept from your days as a teacher. You will have complete discretion as to which of these items is included in my research and alterations will be made to any copies taken to protect your identity." A copy of the original letter is included as Appendix A.

After receipt of the signed consent, I asked each teacher to construct "life lines" (Meyer, 1996) or personal annals to assist them in focusing in on "well remembered events" which can provide a window into teachers' personal understandings (Carter, 1995). In my pilot study, I had tried to ask my four participants what Spradley (1979) referred to as the "Grand Tour" question; i.e., "Tell me your life story". I discovered that both interviewer and interviewee had difficulty staying on track, as the memory of the retired teacher frequently veered off in unanticipated directions. The written chronology provided by each research participant allowed me to follow the path of their professional experience during the interviews with fewer interruptions for clarification.

Interviews were conducted in the retiree's home or my office at the university with one exception; Jim Hunter and I met at the historic McKay Avenue school In Edmonton where he was volunteering as a part-time archivist. This proved to be a highly conducive atmosphere for recalling his professional past.

The teachers seemed eager to share their stories. However, some time was spent getting acquainted before the tape recorder was turned on. I wanted to know something about their present situation in addition to exploring their past. In the home interviews, it was a very sociable atmosphere. Spouses and other members of the family were introduced if present and frequently tea or coffee was served either before or after the interview. This helped to create a very relaxed environment for both interviewer and interviewee. In many cases the teachers had gathered together a number of artifacts from their past and we often spent time looking at photographs, letters, cards, etc. before starting the interview. I had asked each teacher to allow a minimum of two hours for each interview so we would not be pressed for time.

The first interview focused on their early years with particular emphasis on any home and school influences which may have contributed to their decision to enter teaching. Most interviews were between an hour and one half to two hours in length and concluded with a request for the teacher to think about any stories or incidents they might wish to share at our next meeting. Following the interviews, I recorded my impressions in my research journal and reviewed my field notes before listening to the taped interview. The interviews were then transcribed and a verbatim copy of the transcript was mailed or hand delivered to each retired teacher to make any additions, corrections or deletions as they deemed necessary. It was explained to the research participants that they were free to remove any references to persons or events they did not want included in the dissertation. Only the corrected transcript would be used for the actual research and the original taped interview would be returned to them for their family archives once the research was completed. This proved to be a good decision for all involved. The response to the typed transcripts of the first interview ranged from disappointment to dismay. However, I had been prepared for this reaction after reading the following observation made by Middleton and May (1997a) in their study of both practising and retired teachers in New Zealand:

> **Some were appalled by the appearance of transcribed text in comparison with written language and requested detailed editing of the text to bring it into line with 'correct usage.' Many reacted strongly to the 'slang' of their spoken words. Accordingly, we have cleaned up our raw data considerably - removing the 'ums' and 'ers' and digressions which characterise spoken text. [p. 4]**

I followed up the first interview with a telephone survey to obtain additional background information. (See Appendix B) The purpose of the survey was to collect some of the factual information (e.g. years of service, certificate obtained, date of birth, etc.) I needed for my research so that these data would not have to be gathered during the interviews. I wanted the interview time to focus as much as possible on their stories and recollections with minimal interruptions by the interviewer. The first session with each retired teacher followed guidelines provided by Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) for the unstructured interview. Every effort was made to keep the tone conversational and comfortable, "as much like the real world as possible" [p. 86].

For the second interview, a semi-structured process was followed. Hitchcock and Hughes suggest that this type of interview, although less free flowing "allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses" [p. 83]. In preparation for the second interview, I reviewed all of the transcripts a second time. I was looking for questions and topics that had been covered with some of the interviewees that could perhaps be raised with the others. Since it was my intention to use a *grounded theory* approach to my data analysis, I planned on using the results of the first interview to help me to decide the direction and focus of the second (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Although the second interview continued the chronological pattern established in the first, our time together began with my request for clarification or elaboration on some of the data already obtained. I also used some of these clarifications as a transition into the formal interview process. By starting with the tape recorder turned off and taking notes while my participant warmed to their topic, I was able to generate a more thorough response. Here is a sample opening from interview two with Jim:

> **E: Jim, we've been talking informally about this relationship between your military experiences and the influence it had on teaching. Now, you were going to tell me a story that related to that.**
>
> **J: Yes, the story involves an ordinance unit in Drumheller, which was based there partly because of the professional help available through machinists...**

With some coaxing on my part, a number of my informants had decided to write down some of their stories. Interestingly enough, all of the women elected to do so while none of the men managed to get around to it. In addition to a number of stories, Margaret supplied me with an autobiography written entirely in blank verse! The written work not only furnished additional background for their life histories, but also revealed some of their personal metaphors which Knowles (1994) has described as windows into a teacher's life history. The use of metaphors enhances the process Paulo Freire (1983) refers to as *conscientização or* "conscientization" in which the teacher's reading of the 'word' allows us insight into their reading of the 'world' [p. 235-237]. As I explain in Chapter Six, metaphors are used frequently by many teachers to introduce critical events in their professional knowledge development, which are then categorized and recalled as narrative [Bruner, 1987].

Some of the stories also served as lessons or parables conveying the appropriate norms or values for good teaching. Anne's story of her student Freddie is a good example of this genre:

> **Freddy was an interesting little fellow when he arrived in my class for Grade one. I had anticipated him to be a little monster from reports I had heard in the community and his parents. 'Wait 'till you get Freddy.' He seemed to be attentive and willing to try. The fact was, Freddy liked me and responded well to my style of discipline. When I moved to Edmonton, I heard from a colleague who was related to his family that Freddie missed me. He just didn't like his present teacher as well as Miss Danko. Years later when my husband and I were at an auction sale in Flatbush, this man came running up and said, 'Are you Miss Danko?' When I replied that I was, he said, 'I'm Freddy ______.' After we spoke for a while he said, 'I want you to meet my wife and son.' [*Freddy* by Anne Rasmussen]**

Prior to interview three I prepared a list of questions for the research participants to consider. I gave them the opportunity to respond to any of these questions during this final interview session (See Appendix E). I also used this time to "fill in the blanks" on any aspect of their personal or professional lives they felt should be included in their life history. I think at this point both of us realized that three interviews would not be enough to record the story of thirty plus years in the classroom. Again, my review of previous studies had prepared me for this research reality.

3.2.2 The ARTA Connection

As the reader will discover, the data obtained from my ten research participants has been supplemented by the occasional story or anecdote shared with me by other retired teachers in less formal settings. As a new member of the Alberta Retired Teachers Association, I now felt accepted as part of the assemblage. I took the opportunity at a number of social events to join or listen in as the retirees shared their stories with each other and add to my collection of images and metaphors. As Joseph and Burnaford (1994) have stated, "Teachers comprehend their work by telling stories about it, and the images they create are the basis of their stories" [p. 40]. Quite obviously, the image making continues even into retirement; these exchanges over tea reminded me a great deal of the "story swapping" that occurs every day in school staff rooms [Kainan, 1995].

Some of the best images of teaching came from those informal interactions. For example, I remember sitting next to "Martha" - a former high school English teacher - at a tea one August afternoon when she remarked to a neighbour that she wished she had retired ten years earlier than she had. "Then why didn't you?" inquired the other teacher. "Well, I guess it's just like chewing gum." she replied. "Sometimes you just keep on chewing and chewing and chewing, even though the flavour has long gone out of it."

Mullen (1992) in his study of the elderly found that his research participants were eager to be interviewed and that there was no shortage of subjects. I found this true as well. I met and conversed with a number of retired teachers that I would have liked to include in my research. Instead, I have elected to include their voices as occasional elaborations on the themes revealed in the interviews of my ten selected informants.

3.3 Analysis, Explanation and Presentation

Once all thirty interviews had been transcribed, I entered the data into a computer software program called NU*DIST, or "Non-numerical Unstructured Data -Indexing, Searching and Theorizing. NU*DIST provides the qualitative researcher with a fast and effective way to code data in an indexing system and then analyze the data for themes or emerging patterns. As Richards (1998) explains in the NU*DIST handbook,

> **NU*DIST provides a tool kit for managing and exploring documents, creating and developing ideas and theories about them. You use the tools as required by your research goals and methodological purposes. [p. 10]**

The interview transcripts, personal chronologies and teaching stories written by the research participants generated more than 600 pages of data. NU*DIST served as a giant□ electronic filing cabinet with full word searching capability and the flexibility to re-sort the data as many times as necessary to search for theoretical constructs and commonalties. With NU*DIST I was able to construct an individual profile for each research participant utilizing pre-established categories for indexing. These included such headings as "Positive School Experiences", "Father's Influence" and "Initial University Training". I then revisited the data and developed broader thematic categories that were common to at least three of the retired teachers' histories. (E.g. "strapping stories," "encounters with former students" and "overcoming obstacles stories"). Subsequently, I re-checked the entire data base employing the text search capabilities of NU*DIST to look for themes or stories that might have been omitted. Once all the data had been coded and indexed in NU*DIST, I used a second computer program called INSPIRATION to visually represent the emerging themes and story patterns. A sample copy of the resulting diagram is reproduced in Appendix D.

With the exception of Chapter Four, which offers a highly condensed historical background for the life histories under study, the balance of this dissertation is taken up with analysis, explanation and presentation of the data.

Chapter Five provides a short pre-service biography for each of the ten retired teachers included in this study. It also includes an analysis of those factors that not only influenced their decision to enter teaching but helped to shape their professional lives as well. As I compiled and collated the interview and autobiographical data from my research participants, it became evident that I had amassed enough data for several dissertations. I therefore decided to use a thematic approach to describe the professional life of my informants using illustrative examples from their respective careers.

Chapters Six and Seven focus on the personal and professional events and circumstances which contributed to the growth of their "practical" knowledge from their first assignment until retirement.(Fenstermacher, 1994) Through the stories collected by interview and from their personal writing, the reader will hear both the individual and collective voice of ten developing professionals as they gain in confidence and competence in the elementary classroom.

Chapter Six continues the individual biographies begun in Chapter Five and provides the reader with a summary of their respective careers. Chapter Seven looks at these same histories from a thematic perspective using a simple, three part chronology. This chapter contains the results of our collaborative effort through a review of their life histories to discover Schwab's "wisdom of practice" as discussed in the thesis introduction.

Chapter Eight reports on what occurred when I asked my retired teachers in the final interview to look back and reflect upon a lifetime in teaching.

In Chapter Nine, I summarize what I have learned from this research and draw together some ideas and inferences which suggest the need for additional research in the area of personal life history. I conclude the thesis with some thoughts on how we might use the stories of these and other teachers to improve the quality of our teacher education programs

CHAPTER FOUR: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Good morning to you, Good morning to you,
We're all in our places, with sunshiny faces.
For this is the way, to start a new day.
We work and we play. A beautiful day.
(Anonymous)

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with an overview of the critical events that helped shape the educational system of this province. I have also included some references to events in Canadian history, which have impacted on the lives of the teachers included in my study. As well, the chapter will serve as an introduction to the ten retired teachers who are the focus of this dissertation, and, as indicated in Chapter 1, provide a backdrop for the important events that serve as milestones on their journey. For a more comprehensive history of education in Alberta, the reader is referred to the works of Chalmers (1967), Johnson (1968), Wilson et al. (1970), Jones et al. (1979), and Palmer (1990).

4.1 Rural Schooling At the Turn of the Century

The first schools in Alberta were established by missionaries, but as settlers moved into the territory, they were given the right to form school districts, to build schools, and to hire teachers. In 1905, when Alberta entered Confederation along with Saskatchewan, the newly formed Provincial Department of Education took over supervision of the existing 560 school districts, retaining the administrative structure established by the territorial government.

At that time, more than two thirds of Alberta's 75,000 people were either on prairie wheat farms or ranches in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. The size of each school district was determined by the distance a child could be expected to walk to school, usually about two miles. Government regulations required the school to be located in the centre of the proposed district, resulting in the formation of school divisions which were usually four miles square. The "4x4" school districts, each with a distinct name and official number, had to contain at least four taxpayers and a minimum of eight children not younger than five nor older than sixteen (Charyk, 1968).

By 1910, the number had grown to 1501 districts and the province was struggling to provide teachers for all of them (Chalmers, 1967). Western Canada was experiencing a tremendous growth in population as a result of the Federal Government's efforts to settle the prairies as rapidly as possible. The Canadian Government had implemented a colonization policy where land was sold in large blocks to colonies of ethnic groups. This policy, as Johnson (1968) explains:

> **made difficult the nation-building task of the school, i.e., that of assimilating foreign children and making them "new Canadians." It was often difficult to get qualified teachers to live and work in these foreign districts where they could not speak the prevailing language. [p. 99]**

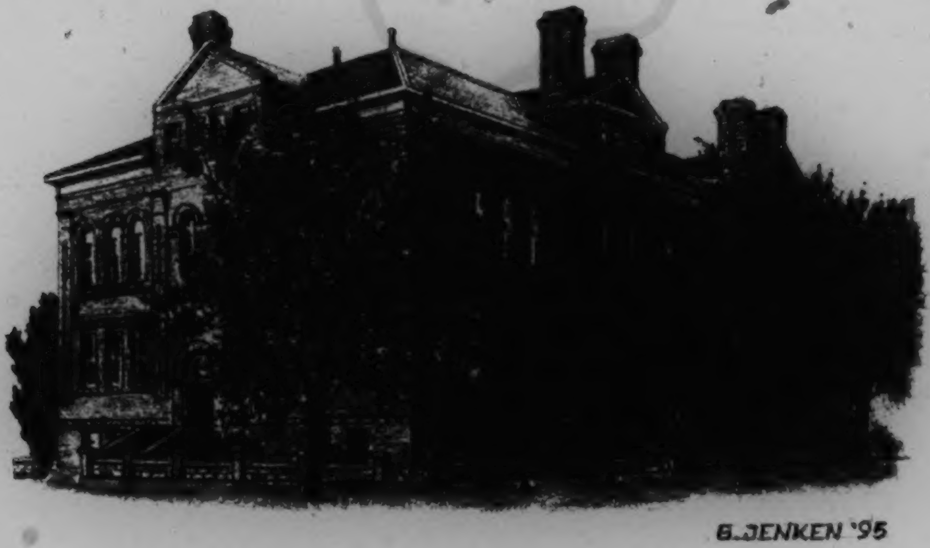
The new settlers realized the importance of education to their children's future, and as soon as the homestead was well enough established to ensure the family's survival, the next priority was school. For the children growing up in this agrarian society, school was often a welcome break from their daily chores.

> **Old railway ties or logs had to be held down while sawed into stove lengths, blocks of wood had to be chopped and piled, cows brought in and milked, pigs, calves and chickens fed and watered, water pumped, gopher poison set out, coops and barn cleaned, kindling split, slop pails emptied, coal buckets filled, ashes taken out, eggs collected, gardens weeded, horses groomed, rocks picked, straw stacks burned, and butchered hogs scraped. [Charyk, 1977, p. 6]**

As Sheehan (1986) has pointed out, the new government of Alberta had inherited a school organization, a program of studies, and a financing arrangement from the Northwest Territories. While curriculum, evaluation and teacher education and certification were controlled by the provincial minister of education, each school district elected a board of trustees who had the responsibility of building, equipping and operating local schools. For approximately half the children in Alberta, this meant they received their basic education in a one-room school incorporating six to eight grades, most likely with a young, inexperienced, female teacher. These one-room schools were poorly constructed and had the minimum in equipment and supplies - a situation which did not really improve until the outbreak of the Second World War. Teacherages, if they existed at all, might consist of a lean-to attached to the side of the school, or perhaps a converted granary moved to the site by sledge.

It is therefore not surprising that as rural teachers gained both experience and training, they moved to the town and city schools to service Alberta's rapidly growing urban population. Many of the metropolitan schools erected in this era still exist, and indeed, their spacious classrooms and large windows are often the envy of elementary teachers today attempting to offer a student-centred curriculum in one of our modern "portable relocatables". These magnificent Edwardian buildings were usually two or three stories high, built of brick, and decorated with bell towers and turrets. Classrooms, with high ceilings and oiled wooden floors, were arranged on each side of a spacious central corridor. Teachers in these schools were generally better trained, less transient and did not suffer the professional isolation of their rural counterparts. The salaries of urban teachers were usually better as well – averaging $1200 in the urban areas compared to $840 for the rural educator [Kostek, Personal communication, 2000 03 25].

McKay Avenue School, pictured below, is typical of city schools at the beginning of the twentieth century.



McKay Avenue School, Edmonton, Alberta. Circa 1912

4.1.1 School Curriculum and the Cultural Mosaic

More than a million immigrants established themselves on the prairies in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Although many came from Eastern Canada, the United States, and the British Isles, the majority came from Northern and Central Europe, bringing with them many different languages, customs and religions. The parklands of Central Alberta were particularly attractive to the settlers from Eastern Europe, who did not feel comfortable on the treeless plains of the south. They were a hardworking, honest and serious people who were determined to be successful in their newly adopted country. They wanted a better life for their children, but were proud of their cultural heritage and anxious to maintain it. However, schools in Alberta at that time did little to promote or take advantage of the cultural mosaic that existed on the prairies. According to Tomkins (1986), for New Canadians "Schooling was viewed as the prime means of uplifting them and their children from iniquity to Canadian levels of morality and industry" [p. 31].

There was also a growing fear in Canada that its citizens would be unduly influenced by the more secular and republican views of educators south of the border. Church leaders and politicians alike were anxious to ensure that western settlers raised their children in a system based on British Imperialism and Protestant ethics, a system which had changed little since its introduction in Upper Canada by Egerton Ryerson in the middle of the last century. The result, as Herbert T. Coutts once remarked, was that "In western Canada, we tended to borrow our programs from Ontario...The flow was from Britain to Ontario to the west" (Hodysh and McIntosh, 1982, p. 24).

Sheehan (1986) has also commented on the patriotic and moral overtones of the school curriculum in this era:

> **The program of studies was academic, bookish, and memory-oriented... With the science of education in its infancy, with undereducated teachers in classrooms and with the belief that truth was absolute and knowledge finite, the textbook became the centre of the course of study. It taught not**

> **only the content to be learned for the provincial examinations, but also an unquestioning belief in society and one's place in that society. [p. 39-40]**

As Larry Cuban (1993) has pointed out, we know very little about how teachers taught in the first decades of this century, and the few accounts that do exist portray a bleak picture of classrooms dominated by severe schoolmasters and rote learning. It is probably safe to assume that most of the instruction in Alberta at the turn of the century was similar to that described by Cubberley in his 1913 survey of Portland, Oregon schools:

> **Passive, routine, clerical are the terms that most fittingly describe the attitude of principals and grammar grade teachers toward their work. [Except for one lesson,] in all of my visits to grammar-grade rooms, I heard not a single question asked by a pupil, not a single remark or comment made to indicate that the pupil had any real vital interest in the subject matter. [cited in Cuban, 1993, p. 29]**

The Alberta school curriculum at the elementary level was to change very little until the mid 1930's and the introduction of Progressive Education. As Cuban has indicated, schools in the first decades of the twentieth century were expected not only to develop moral and obedient citizens, but to teach students the skills necessary to become productive members of an increasingly industrialized society [ibid. p. 38]. Education should have a "scientific basis" according to the new psychology of Watson and Pavlov, and the primary role of the teacher was to expedite the process. The writings of Dewey, Froebel, Pestalozzi and others which were beginning to influence American educational thought had little initial impact on schools of the Canadian West at this time.

4.1.2 Staffing the One Room Prairie School

From 1901 to 1914 the population of Alberta grew from 70,000 to 470, 000 (MacGregor, 1972). The astonishing population growth at the start of this century, combined with a desire by Alberta's new residents for their children to receive a formal education, resulted in a serious shortage of teachers in the young province. To help alleviate the problem, the first normal school in Alberta was opened in Calgary in 1906, followed by a second facility in Camrose in 1912.

However, even though these teacher training institutions graduated two classes a year, they could not keep up with the demand for teachers. Chalmers (1967) informs us that in its first decades of existence, Alberta was heavily dependent on teachers trained in other provinces, the United States and the British Isles. Most were not prepared for the hard life of the one room rural school teacher, and many returned home or moved as quickly as possible to the city and town schools as positions became open. The thousands of one-room schools scattered across the prairies opened and closed their doors according to the economics of the community and the availability of teachers, and school inspectors of this period expressed grave concerns over the quality of education the children were receiving (Jones et al., 1979).

It is perhaps not surprising then, to discover that teacher turnover during this period was high. Citing several school inspector reports from this era, Chalmers (1967) notes that concern was expressed over teachers' lack of punctuality, uneven instruction, poor discipline and a proclivity to leave their positions "on the slightest excuse for greener pastures" [p. 33].

Another challenge for the rural school teacher in this era was pupil attendance. According to Chalmers (ibid.), attendance in the country school frequently averaged less than fifty percent, despite the fact that the school year was only 160 days compared to an urban average of 190 days or more [p. 37]. Although education was important to rural families, farm chores and inclement weather had to be considered as well. Attendance was also a concern in city schools, but truancy actually helped school officials deal with another chronic problem. A report in the Edmonton *Evening Journal* for May 5, 1906 noted that "If it were not that the attendance was so irregular, the rooms of all the schools would be packed" (Kostek, 1992, p. 93). The problem of unqualified and underqualified teachers in Alberta continued until well after the Second World War, and was a major factor in determining the career paths of my research participants. Concern over inequities in the quality of education in rural versus urban schools appears not only in the life stories of these retired teachers, but is also a recurring theme in the Annual Reports produced by the Alberta Department of Education. Normal schools in particular were criticized for their failure to overcome these discrepancies. Patterson (1979) reports that in one of the last years of operation, 1944-45, over 80 % of the 'Normalites' came from rural backgrounds, and over 90% of these would return to their rural communities to teach. In fact, the real and perceived differences between country schools and city schools remain an issue in this province today.

Although the new province faced many challenges in these early years, a spirit of optimism and a sense of excitement prevailed. Between 1905 and 1922, the Canadian National Railway was constructed across the province, and its numerous branch lines helped to increase settlement in Central Alberta. As the automobile became a familiar sight on the prairie landscape, the government realized a major effort would be needed to develop a secondary highway system throughout rural Alberta. There were also significant changes in agriculture. Mechanization resulted in larger areas under cultivation, and the development by Charles Saunders in 1910 of the fast ripening Marquis wheat permitted Alberta farmers to plant grain further north than ever before. Improved transportation and the rapid growth of towns built around grain elevators signaled the beginning of the end of the 4X4 school district. It was a time of rapid expansion and high optimism, and in the words of one early school inspector, "For a new country, it must be and is admitted on all sides, we are making wonderful strides in educational matters and the outlook is even better for the future" [H. Thibaudeau, 1908; cited in Chalmers, p. 4].

4.2 World War One

Immigration to Canada and the western expansion were severely curtailed by the onset of war in Europe. According to Statistics Canada, in 1913 there were 400,870 immigrant arrivals in Canada. By 1918, this number had dropped to 41,845. Although the farm harvests were bountiful and farmers and ranchers prospered in Alberta, there was a shortage of labour as the supply of European immigrants was cut off and many young Canadians left the farm to work in war related industries or to serve in the military. The passage in 1917 of the Military Service Act and the beginning of conscription intensified the teacher shortage. Married women, who were unable to find employment before the war, were now urgently sought out and asked to return to the classroom. Districts were forced to employ "permit" teachers who were often university undergraduates, or even high school students, as supervisors for the Alberta Correspondence School Branch. This strategy of lowering teacher qualification standards as a response to teacher shortages would be used again later in the century when the country was once more at war. An attempt was also made to consolidate school districts for more efficient operation, but there was considerable resistance in rural communities to abandoning their country schools.

1918 proved to be an important year in the history of Alberta and Western Canada. It marked the end of World War One, the granting of the federal franchise to women and the onset of the Spanish influenza epidemic, which basically shut down the schools in Alberta from mid-October until the end of the year. By January, approximately 30,000 flu cases were reported in Alberta, resulting in more than 3000 deaths. In many ways, the influenza epidemic in the fall of 1918 was more devastating to the province than fours years of war.

4.3 The Roaring Twenties

According to Chalmers, Alberta passed through the Roaring Twenties with little of the flamboyance usually associated with this era. Albertans watched but had little influence on international events such as the futile attempts to establish the League of Nations or the American experiment with prohibition. They were far more concerned with rising freight rates and falling grain prices [Ibid., p. 71]. The problems of drought and depression that were to prove so devastating to the prairie economy in the 1930's had already manifested themselves in the Southern Alberta dry belt region as early as 1917. The discovery of oil in Turner Valley did generate some excitement, but nothing like the boom that would follow the Second World War. According to the 1921 census, the population of Alberta in that year had increased to 588,454 and school enrollment approached 150,000 students. High school enrollment more than doubled during the 1920's, as parents encouraged their children to continue their education. Teachers were no longer in short supply and districts sought out more qualified applicants [Wilson et al., 1970].

Alberta now had three normal schools in operation and the term had been expanded from four months to eight. However, there was an obvious need for more extensive preparation of teachers in this province. George Buck (1993) reports that the President of the University of Alberta, Marshall Tory, had been struggling with the Department of Education to establish a School of Education at the university since 1912. Despite the full support for this initiative from the Alberta Teachers Alliance, the Department, reluctant to give up that portion of their authority over teacher education in Alberta, succeeded in delaying the School of Education's establishment until 1928 [p. 321].

The decade following the war saw the gradual untying of Canada's apron strings from Britain. As journalist Bruce Hutchinson put it, Canada entered World War I as a colony and emerged as a nation. In 1922, a new series of texts entitled *The Canadian Readers* were introduced with frontispieces featuring the Canadian Ensign and the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa (Sheehan, 1986). Canada was emerging as a separate nation, and the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation was celebrated in 1927 with a great deal of national pride.

4.4 The Great Depression

All but one of the retired teachers in my study were young children during the 1930's. Jim, born in 1916, has perhaps the clearest memories of this decade, but even Thor, who was still a month short of his fifth birthday when Canada proclaimed war on Germany, remembers the Depression. Some, like Anne, felt it even influenced their teaching:

> **I was born in a log cabin on a homestead in Flatbush. My parents had immigrated to Canada just before the Depression. They had very little money and jobs were difficult to find. Dad worked from sunrise to sunset for one dollar cutting grass with a scythe for hay. Their discussion and efforts to make a meager living had an impact on me. To this day I think twice before I purchase anything. The frugalness [sic] also carried over to the classroom. I hated to see kids waste paper and pencils. I always made them write on both sides of the paper and fill the entire paper with writing. [From "*My Teachers*", by Anne Rasmussen, December,1997]**

It is a decade Canadians are not likely to forget, especially those living on the Prairies during the "Dirty Thirties". Although the world in general was going through a period of economic depression, the combination of high debt loads, low wheat prices and severe drought proved devastating to the Alberta farmer and rancher. According to Palmer (1990), net farm income in Alberta dropped from

$102 million in 1928 to only $5 million in 1933. Average per capita income in the province declined from $548 in 1928, third highest in the country, to $212 in 1933, well below the national average [p. 244].

Unemployment hit 15%, and as a consequence, applications for normal school increased, as did enrollment in secondary education. Rural schools struggled to stay open and teachers not only experienced drastic wage reductions, but often received part of their pay in farm produce. By 1934, it was clear to Alberta's citizens that there was a serious problem, and the UFA government proved unable to cope with the growing social and economic crisis.

As a result, the people of Alberta turned to the Social Credit policies of William Aberhart for relief. Aberhart was a well-known educator and religious figure before he entered politics. His Sunday afternoon sermons regularly filled every one of the 2,200 seats in Calgary's Palace Theatre, and in 1925, Aberhart was invited to broadcast his message over CFCN radio. A skilful orator, he soon had a vast following of regular listeners. Aberhart became interested in the writings of Scottish economist Clifford Douglas, who maintained that lack of money and/or credit had caused the world economic downturn and that the issuance of script or prosperity certificates could alleviate the problem. Convinced that the Douglas' ideas would work in Alberta, "Bible Bill" began to include some of the Douglas precepts in his radio broadcasts (Corcoran and Marks, 1996).

The promise of renewed affluence coming from a leader who espoused fundamental Christian beliefs and preached a need to curb the power held by chartered banks proved irresistible to the populace. Despite the fact that Aberhart himself did not run for office, in August of 1935 the fledgling Social Credit party swept 56 of the 63 seats in the Provincial Legislature. The remaining seven seats were split between the Liberals and the Conservatives, while every candidate of the United Farmers of Alberta went down to defeat. In less than three years of political activity and only one year of active campaigning, Aberhart's fledgling Social Credit Party had wiped out the UFA (Watkins, 1980, p. 97).

Aberhart had been principal of Crescent Heights High School in Calgary before moving full time into the political arena, and many of his caucus were school teachers by profession. The newly elected representatives also included a number of clergymen, small businessmen, and wage earners ready to support a new social agenda for the province. Consequently, the new government introduced legislation to improve local government, health care, social services and education.

4.4.1 Progressivism in Alberta

Although the process was to occur much more slowly here than the United States, the twenties and thirties witnessed a major change in education in Canada. There was a reduced emphasis on teacher directed instruction and a gradual introduction of manual training, domestic science and physical education into the curriculum. As Sheehan (1986) has put it, this was a "first attempt to move schools away from an emphasis on books, facts, memorization and unrelated and irrelevant material to a focus which taught the whole child using objective methods and familiar content"[p. 43].

Work on a completely revised curriculum had begun in 1934 under the UFA government and was pursued with enthusiasm by the new Minister of Education, William Aberhart. The Committee charged with the task of developing new elementary school curriculum was heavily influenced by the pragmatism of John Dewey and the Progressive education movement spreading rapidly across the United States. According to Dewey's (1904) philosophy, children should be "learning by doing," and school should more accurately reflect the world outside the classroom. He advocated a shift in emphasis from teacher-directed to child-centred activities with a corresponding integration of the traditional school subjects.

As the movement gained momentum in the United States, Dewey became increasingly dissatisfied with the lack of change in the high schools of that nation, where he felt there was "far more talk about it than the doing of it" (Dworkin, 1959). To assist in the implementation of the progressivist philosophy at all levels of schooling in Alberta, the Department of Education changed the eight year elementary, four year high school structure to a six year elementary, three year junior high and three year senior high configuration (Sheehan, 1986, p. 44).

In his doctoral dissertation Patterson (1968) argues that the province's adoption of Progressivism was almost coincidental:

> **The period of Alberta's educational history from 1920 to 1935 was marked by a great deal of activity and interest in education. The most pressing problem, that of more adequately providing for an expanding school population in a school system with great disparities, captivated the attention of the public, the government and the profession... Conditions were ripe for change in education. Progressive education was on the scene and ready. It offered the flexibility and closeness to life which was desired by the opponents of the existing system. [p. 62]**

The most observable difference in the elementary classroom as a result of the new curriculum was the introduction of the Enterprise. Stamp (1975) has referred to it as "the most radical attempt at curriculum revision in Alberta's history" [p.80]. As Tomkins (1986) has noted, the term "Enterprise" comes from the Hadow Reports published in Great Britain between 1926 and 1933. Tomkins believes the Department of Education selected Enterprise over the equivalent American "Project Method" so that the progressive ideas represented by this curricular innovation would be ascribed to British, rather than American influences [p. 194].

The Enterprise was approved for all Alberta schools in 1936, resulting in a flood of teachers to special summer sessions in Edmonton. With pedagogical support from Dr. Donalda Dickie, normal school instructor and author of *The Enterprise in Theory and Practice*, and with administrative support from Dr. H.C. Newland, Supervisor of Schools for Alberta, Enterprise was quickly adopted across Alberta, but not without encountering problems. As Sheehan (1986) points out, the Enterprise program required teachers who had the ability to integrate subject matter and to use resources other than the textbook. "These," adds Chalmers, "simply were not available to the depression stricken school systems...of the 1930's in Alberta" [1967, p. 93]. Nevertheless, Chalmers records that "By the time World War II broke out, no respectable elementary classroom was complete without a sandbox in the corner, depicting an Alberta farm, an Eskimo village, or an Indian Encampment" [ibid., p. 91].

Despite the enthusiastic endorsement for the program by Deputy Minister of Education Fred McNally, Patterson (1979) reports that there was difficulty in implementation right from the start. Like most initiatives that begin from the top, the individuals responsible for its classroom introduction were somewhat less enthusiastic about the change (La Fleur, 1977). As the Enterprise was a voluntary program, most teachers continued to instruct the 3 R's and fit Enterprise in if and when they could. In doing so, they usually had the full support of their school community. Many Albertans were openly skeptical of "feel good" education, and were not at all reticent about sharing that view with a local trustee over coffee. They realized that education was the key to a different future for their children, and therefore regarded it as serious business.

One of the major difficulties for both parent and teacher was in trying to relate this new educational initiative to their own school experience. Thor's response to a question about Enterprise during our second interview was perhaps typical of many of his colleagues from that era:

> **I just recall the vast amount of project work we developed to make the Enterprise not only teach the social studies spectrum, but also to try to tie in math, and the sciences, and make it a holistic program. I recall it as being something that we ended up breaking up more into subjects, than treating it in an integrated way, as was the intent of the creator. I remember it as being confusion, and a jumble, for a young teacher. I don't recall feeling successful with it at all. [Thor, #2, 1997 12 22]**

Nevertheless, the educator-□dominated Socred government persisted with its implementation and Enterprise survived the war. A curriculum bulletin, published in 1947 by the Alberta Department of Education, stressed that the Enterprise should place major emphasis on Social Studies and "merge it with Health and Science." In addition, " Language, reading, literature, music, art, arithmetic, penmanship, and physical education are to be regarded as fields for correlation and are to be treated in as close a conjunction to the Enterprise as may be feasible" [p. 16].

The bulletin contains a number of pictures of elementary aged children engaged in Enterprise-like activities with captions like "good reading habits can be encouraged by an attractive book-corner such as this" [ibid., p. 53]. Considerable time is spent as well in the introductory sections of the bulletin explaining the scientific nature of the "actual inward process of learning", based on "S-R or the Connectionist Theory... the theory of conditioning and... the Gestalt theory on the power of insight or reasoned relationships" [p. 8].

"These boys make a life study for a mural. The model is posing as an Egyptian charioteer." [From *The Enterprise, 1947,* p. 4.]

I have spent some time discussing the influence of progressivism for two reasons. First, because it was arguably the most important development in educational theory in Alberta this century, and second, because it had great impact on the professional lives of the teachers in my study. All of my research participants shared Enterprise stories, and several regarded it as the highlight of their teaching day. Margaret, for example, remembers her introduction to the concept:

> **I still recall Donalda Dickie teaching us how to make language meaningful and how to teach reading...The Enterprise method was just starting in 1938 when I was at Normal school. We probably had the best authorities as our teachers that year at school, and the method really appealed to me. My first year of teaching was not my best year for teaching with the Enterprise method, but as I gained more experience and confidence, I improved. [Margaret, # 2, 1997 11 18]**

Pauline, on the other hand, was more skeptical of its educational value:

> **I think I had a little bit of a negative bias towards Enterprise - probably as a result of my own school experiences with it. The last period in the day was usually Enterprise, and I remember we'd scoot to the back to the sand table, and we'd spend the whole period playing in the sand. So, I was never sure where the learning was taking place. [Pauline, # 2, 1997 12 06]**

It would seem that the individual teacher's response to this key innovation in provincial curriculum was determined to some extent by their existing educational philosophy. Mary was very much in favour of a constructivist learning environment for children, and Enterprise fit right in.

> **I often taught using a theme, or Enterprise, and it worked very well for me. It was a very effective way of meeting the children's needs. I remember one time a child indicated that he was very interested in horses, so I created a theme on horses which didn't thrill me too much, but the child was totally involved. Later, when the theme was expanded, a parent helped by bringing in a saddle that was set up on a sawhorse to become the centre of our thematically related materials. [Mary, # 2, 1997 12 15]**

Two other important education-related changes occurred in Alberta during the Depression. The first was the introduction of legislation in 1935 establishing a charter for the Alberta Teachers Association. The Alberta Teachers Alliance, which had pressed for the legislation, was disappointed when the UFA government refused to make membership in the ATA mandatory for all teachers in the province. It is perhaps indicative of the shift in political climate that in 1936 the provision of automatic membership was approved by a Social Credit government that had eleven teachers in its caucus.

The new government also decided to 'bite the bullet' in regard to the continuing problem of the rural school district. All of the difficulties experienced by the small rural boards in keeping their school open in the 1920s were exacerbated by the depression. Johnson (1968) sums up the situation nicely when he states that "The chief fault with the rural school district, however, was that it was far too small an area with too slender a tax base to provide modern educational facilities" [p. 111].

In 1930, the Dominion Bureau of Statistics issued a report entitled the *Comparative Efficiency of Consolidated and Rural Schools in Canada* .The report indicated that the problem of funding small rural schools was common to all provinces but the situation was worse in " the western wheat-growing provinces".

It also pointed out the advantages of consolidation in terms of provision of services and standards of education [p.1]. The Social Credit government had included the issue of consolidation in their election platform, so it was not surprising that in 1933, sixty-seven districts in the drought stricken Drumheller area were merged into the Berry Creek S.D. No. 1. Despite strong opposition from rural school trustees who often had close ties with the former UFA government, eleven divisions were created out of a total of 774 small rural districts in 1937, and by 1941 Alberta had fifty large divisions functioning [Johnson, 1968, p. 112]. As one retired teacher remembers

> **There were a lot of unhappy people when they shut the school down. I remember Mom and Dad going to meeting after meeting. It meant the little ones would spend nearly three hours on the bus each day. That was hard in winter, and eventually Dad said "Let's sell out and move closer to town. I want to be there when my kids grow up." (Thelma, Interview 1998 09 12)**

The success of the Social Credit government in Alberta had implications for all of Canada. Despite a lack of funding from the federal government, the Socreds introduced legislation and funding for improved hospital care - including maternity benefits, and opened up the Treasury branches which had greater flexibility than chartered banks in the provision of home, small business and farm loans. In the eyes of many Canadians, the social experiment in Alberta appeared to be succeeding.

Primary Classroom in Lethbridge, Alberta – June, 1915

4.5 Canada and World War II

Like most countries, Canada was not prepared for a second world conflict only two decades after the last one had ended. The grim reality of the Great War, soon to be referred to as "World War I", had resulted in the loss of 60, 661 lives, and few families in Canada had emerged unscathed. The defeat of R.B. Bennett's Conservative government in 1935 and the return of Mackenzie King and the Liberals gave many Canadians hope that the end of the Depression was in sight. In Alberta, many were optimistic that the "funny money" theories proposed by Major Douglas and Bill Aberhart might actually work. As Stacey (1998) has put it,

Canadian Soldiers off to WW 2

> **Memories of W W I — the tragic loss of life, the heavy burden of debt and the strain on the country's unity imposed by conscription, made Canadians, including politicians of all parties, loath to contemplate another such experience...Only gradually did the progress of events, notably Nazi aggression, alter this mood to the point where Canada was prepared to take part in another world war. [p. 1]**

Despite the lack of enthusiasm, Prime Minister McKenzie King knew that Canada would have to enter the conflict at some point, but he insisted that the decision be made by an independent Canadian Parliament. After a relatively brief debate, Canada declared war on Germany on September 10, 1939, one week after Britain had done so.

The entire country became involved with the war effort. On both the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts shipyards worked to capacity, and the farms of the prairies doubled production to feed soldier and civilian alike. Canada also became "the airdrome of democracy" by training more than 130,000 aircrew from Canada, Australia, Britain and New Zealand under the Commonwealth Air Training Program. According to Chalmers (1967) it was the airmen who had the most immediate and dramatic effect on Alberta.

> **The airmen were everywhere in Alberta, in churches (occasionally), at public dances and private parties, on every bus and train, and on the side of the road thumbing a ride back from a 48-hour pass. This ubiquitous force pre-empted the Edmonton Municipal Airport...the University of Alberta residences... and to obtain training facilities, it ousted the teachers-in-training from the Edmonton Normal School. [p. 104]**

Everyone was affected by the war. The cost of living rose while unemployment dropped. Despite the restrictions in goods and services, the average annual income rose from $975 in 1940 to $1538 in 1945. Farmers were also doing well, as wheat rose from $.80 a bushel in 1938 to $1.83 in 1945. (Gaffen, 1998)

The Wartime Prices and Trade Board had been created in 1939 to control the price and distribution of food, fuel and other necessities. Wage freezes were in place and government permission was required to change jobs. Ration books were issued to every man, woman and child to preserve sugar, coffee, butter and alcohol. Even men's and women's clothing was affected, with fashions becoming simpler to save on fabric use. Many families put their cars up on blocks for the winter because gasoline and rubber tires were difficult to obtain. Farmers, however, had a way around the restriction:

> **We didn't have a car until 1948. As a farmer, there was no limit to the gasoline you could buy. That wasn't rationed, and a lot of farmers were driving with purple gas in the car. But we didn't even have a car to worry about getting caught that way. [Thor, Interview # 1, 1997 10 29]**

All of my research participants had stories and memories from the war. Some, like Alice's, concern the loss of close friends or relatives.

> **We were very conscious of there being a war. A neighbour's son who was in the Air Force drove us into Two Hills where we had a concert. I said I couldn't sit in the back seat 'cause I wasn't feeling well. So, I sat between him and my teacher, and I was really in love with this man. Unfortunately, right after that, he was lost in the war. [Alice, Interview # 1, 1997 07 08]**

Peggy, who was thirteen at the time, recalled the "invasion" of Americans in Alberta in 1942 while an air base was being constructed in Edmonton. She was particularly impressed with how well prepared they were for winter in terms of fleece-lined boots and bomber jackets, and how quickly they got things done. She also recalled the effects of rationing and the effort school children made to aid the cause.

> **I remember going in the Mill Creek Ravine and gathering metal for the war effort. We collected anything that might be useful. I remember being almost frightened all the time about what would sort of happen. You are always a bit apprehensive.... We all had ration books, and gasoline and liquor were rationed. Liquor coupons were worth a lot of money if you had them. So life was very interesting. [Peggy, Interview # 1, 1997 07 31]**

Some, like Thor, recall the war being discussed in school as well:

> **As the war went on, we followed the battles on maps at school. At that time political correctness was not part of it, and the 'Nazi's' and the 'Japs' and the 'dirty Germans', and so on was common language. There was a lot of patriotism. There was a lot of pro-Canada and anti-Germany and anti-Japan feeling in the community. [Thor, Interview # 1, 1997 10 29]**

Eugene also recalled gas rationing and salvaging, but the biggest concern in his family was that

> **...we lost contact with our relatives in the Ukraine, and the last letter that arrived after the war had started told about a major fire in the home town. Then worse than that, we just lost contact with them. The communist regime just kept everything quiet. [Eugene, Interview 1, 1997 07 16]**

Margaret, a young teacher and mother during the war, vividly recalls the change that was taking place around her in the rural community of Whitecreek at that time:

> **I also remember being amazed at the effect that the war was having on the community. New economic opportunities appeared, farm products became more profitable to raise. Young men could join the army and be assured of an income and adventure. It wasn't just patriotism. A whole new era was opening in front of our eyes. [Margaret, Interview # 2, 1997 11 18]**

4.5.1 Alberta Schools and World War II

During the war years, the migration of families from farm to city which had begun in the depression was accelerated. Despite improved crops and markets, farm life was very difficult. Even with increased mechanization on the farm, the workday was long and physically demanding. Although the rural electrification program allowed farm women to take advantage of household appliances like the electric range and washer, their work day still began long before sunrise and continued well into the evening. For young men and women, there were many new career opportunities in both the military and civilian workforce that seemed far more attractive than the drudgery faced by their parents.

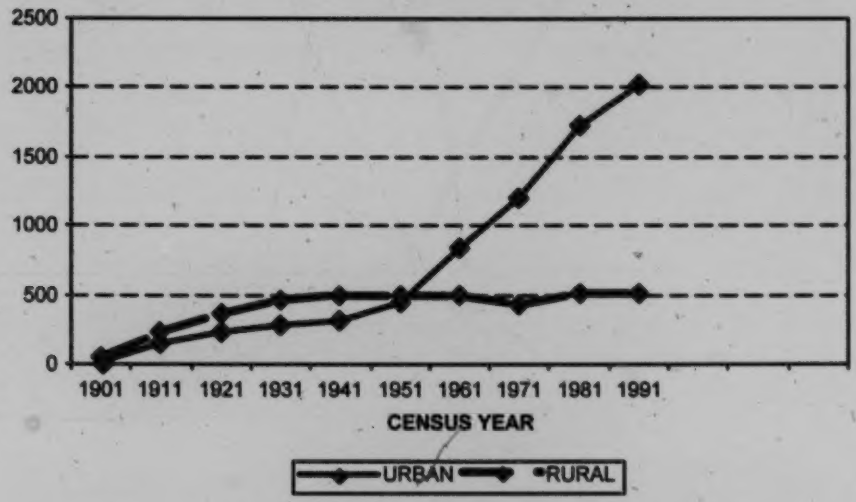
> **Winter wasn't so bad, but the other three seasons it seemed we worked from dawn to dusk. Some times my Dad fell asleep in the middle of supper, and Mom was always busy doing something. I knew they were doing it for us, but at 14, I had already made up my mind not to be a farmer. [Peter, Interview 1997 06 06]**

> **One of my father's favourite refrains that I recall as a child was "I should have gone into the army so I wouldn't have to work so hard. After he passed away in 1971, I remember my mother saying to me, 'I wish he had gone into the army. He might have lived longer.' [Marion, 1996 11 12]**

> **I seldom saw my dad or older brothers during spring planting and fall harvesting. They were in the fields before I was awake and home for supper after Mom had already tucked me in. Both my mom and Aunt Alicia were old women by forty. There was no way that was going to happen to me. (Thelma, Interview 1997 09 12)**

The flight to the city by choice or necessity and the consolidation of school districts by the Social Credit government marked the beginning of the end for the one room schoolhouse in Alberta [See Figure 2]. Chalmers reports that the number of classrooms in this province fell from 6200 in 1941 to only 5500 in 1945 [p.109]. A significant part of the reduced enrolment at the secondary level was a result of student enlistment. In Edmonton, 1400 high school students had joined Canada's armed forces - 115 of who did not return (Kostek, 1992). Despite a steady decline in student enrolment and the closure of hundreds of rural schools, the demand for teachers could not be met. The towns and cities of Alberta were experiencing population growths that resulted in both housing shortages and overcrowded schools. Rural communities anxious to keep their school open found difficulty in finding qualified teachers, as many had left their classrooms to enter the military or take one of the many lucrative jobs in the war industry.

Figure 1. berta Population Shift from Rural to Urban
1901-1991



In 1943, the province of Alberta passed an order-in-council which prohibited teachers from leaving their posts unless they were enlisting in the military. Edmonton Superintendent Ross Sheppard, in his Annual Report for 1944, indicated that 15% of the teaching staff - 43 men and 16 women - were on leave of absence serving with the Canadian Forces overseas or doing war work in Canada [ibid., p. 339]. The dearth of trained teachers in Alberta was so critical that in 1944, the government finally responded to the need as they had in the past - by lowering the standards for entry into the profession. In some communities, entire schools of children were registered in correspondence courses and put under the direction of supervisors who, according to Chalmers,

> **were expected to maintain order and decorum, mark the school register, see to the mailing of assignments and their distribution on return from the Correspondence School Branch, keep a record of pupil progress, implement a classroom timetable for studies, encourage the dilatory and assist the slow students. [ibid., p. 109]**

By 1944, 209 of these centres were in operation and the number continued to grow even after the war. One of my research participants, Anne Rasmussen, was employed as a correspondence supervisor as late as 1951. During our interview, Anne informed me that she was offered the job by the Superintendent of Schools on a Saturday morning, accepted the position, and then spent the rest of the day with an experienced teacher who briefed her on her responsibilities. On Sunday, she located a place to board and on Monday morning started as Correspondence supervisor at Blue Hill School!

4.5.2 What Did You Do in the War, Mom?

Canada ended World War Two with a healthy economy, a growing population, and a social safety net. Although the war had cost the country over 42,000 lives and nearly 23 billion dollars, the former British colony had emerged from the conflict as a significant presence on the world stage. In addition, a skilled work force had been created and the military industrial base in Eastern Canada was retooling to meet the insatiable demand for consumer goods. Shipbuilding continued on both coasts and prices for agricultural products remained high. Life was moving at a dizzying but exciting pace. One retired teacher described this feeling perfectly for me over tea: "By the time it was over it was hard to remember how bad it had been before it began!"

In Alberta, the oil industry was poised to take off. The war had demonstrated petroleum's value as a feedstock for industrial products such as synthetic rubber, plastics and fertilizers, and many were convinced that the future of Alberta lay two to five kilometers below its surface. The province was already supplying more than 90% of Canada's domestic oil production through the Turner Valley field. Meanwhile, drilling and exploration continued at Norman Wells, Leduc and, of course, the baffling tar sands of Athabasca.

There was also a fundamental change in the society of Canada itself. In 1943, the federal government commissioned a report on Social Security for Canada authored by Dr. L.C. Marsh. The Marsh report stated that social security was a community responsibility and that government spending should include protection against unemployment, sickness and old age. With encouragement from Tommy Douglas and the newly formed CCF political party in Saskatchewan, Mackenzie King's Liberals passed into law the Unemployment Insurance Act in 1941 and the Family Allowance Act in 1944. They also created a Federal Department of Veteran Affairs to assist the million men and women who had served in Canada's military, and a Department of National Health and Welfare to ensure adequate medical and social care for all Canadians [Gaffen, ibid., p. 2].

Perhaps the most significant change, however, was in the status of women. Although more than 50,000 women had served in the Canadian military during the six years of the Second World War, this was only a small part of their overall contribution to the war effort. As Pierson (1998) has pointed out

> **Canadian women contributed greatly and in diverse ways to the country's war effort during the Second World War. They served in military uniform, in factories, and in voluntary service organizations. For the first time in Canadian history the three branches of the armed forces were opened to women who were other than nursing sisters. An unprecedented proportion of women left the domestic sphere to enter paid employment in the public and private sectors, and the voluntary labour of women was also mobilized on a vaster scale than ever before. [p. 1]**

During the Depression, despite the fact that twenty percent of the unemployed were women, many of the few jobs available to them were first offered to men. In fact, Pierson maintains that the only area of employment still widely available to women in the Thirties was domestic service. The war was to change all that. By 1941, there was a general shortage of fighting men in Europe and another front was about to open in the Far East. The National Defence Headquarters began looking for women who could release men currently in support staff positions for active service. This plan by the Canadian Armed Forces to alleviate manpower shortages "coincided with the keen desire of thousands of women to render service in uniform to their country" [Ibid., p. 2]. By the end of the war, more than 50,000 women had enlisted in one of the three branches of the armed forces. Unfortunately, aside from roughly 4500 nurses, most of the positions filled by these women were in cooking or clerical areas - jobs already considered "female" in nature. Nor did women receive the same pay as their male counterparts - a condition which existed throughout the entire war and persists today.

In the public sector, an active campaign was launched by the National Selective Service to recruit women for war industry. Pierson reports that by 1944, close to 1.2 million women were working full time in Canada's labour force. She also reminds us that "These figures do not take into account female part-time workers, nor the 800,000 women on farms who were doing their full share, with or without personal wages or salaries, to meet farm production schedules" [p. 4].

The war industry opened up career possibilities for women outside of the home. In fact, by mid war there were serious job shortages in the service sector (hospitals, restaurants, laundries, etc.). As the supply of single women and married but childless women had been exhausted, both government and private industry began to provide childcare services for working mothers.

Women also contributed to the war effort in other ways, including the incalculable value of voluntary, unremunerated service. Many of the teachers in my study remember knitting socks and scarves after school as Junior Red Cross Members, or helping their mother make jam and jelly for shipment overseas. And, as Peggy has already indicated, they saved everything: bone, metal, rubber, grease, paper, rags and anything else that was recoverable.

Pierson suggests that while some women had gained a new confidence and a new self-image through wartime service, their optimism was not always justified. Nor did the media support the new image. Movies, magazine advertisements and editorials of the day informed the working women that it was time to return to hearth and home and take advantage of this new world of labour saving appliances and frozen foods. A good example is the February, 1945 article by the beauty editor of Chatelaine magazine entitled "When That Man's Here Again." The article concludes with the ultimatum: "It's up to you to decide what you want most - to walk alone and continue to be your own boss, or to make concessions and have a man in your life" [p. 28].

Marriage statistics and the resulting baby boom indicate women went along with the program. Marriages in Canada doubled from their pre-war levels, and adding to this number were nearly 48,000 wives and 22,000 children who immigrated to Canada as dependents of Canadian servicemen between 1939 and 1946 (Associated Press, 1946).

Colette Oseen, in her 1985 Master's thesis, explored the reasons why the number of women in the professions declined at the very time their percentage of the total work force was increasing. She maintains that in the 1940's, while the clerical and service work force was shifting from male dominated to female dominated, men were entering the traditional female professional areas such as elementary teaching and nursing in increasing numbers [p. 63]. As salary inequities between the sexes were addressed, the economic advantage of hiring women diminished and in the case of teaching, many boards preferred to hire men for their perceived ability to manage unruly children. As Oseen concludes:

> **The Second World War and its aftermath did not engender greater opportunity for Canadian working women. At the end of the decade more women worked, and many more working women were married, but women continued to work in low power, low paid and low status jobs. Rosie the Riveter was an ephemeral image. The highly paid jobs that a few women had held during the war evaporated under the exigencies of peacetime. [p. 127]**

In rural Alberta, the teacher shortage brought on by the war caused many boards to seek out married women and ask them to return to the classroom. In some cases, they were even permitted to teach during the early stages of their pregnancy and many women brought their young children to class with them. However, in the cities it was a different matter. Board policy in Edmonton, established in 1921, required termination of employment for any woman who became married while on staff. She could however, apply for a temporary assignment or work as a substitute teacher. In October of 1943, this policy was challenged by Mrs. Velva Thompson, a recently married teacher with the Edmonton School District, who informed the Board by letter that "It is not my present intention to tender my resignation…[but] to abide strictly by my rights under the School Act, which does not permit any discrimination as between men and women" (Kostek, 1992, p. 340).

Neither the Provincial government nor the Alberta Teachers Association would support the Board's position in this regard, and as a result, women were no longer forced to resign after marriage. Kostek reports that Mrs. Thompson remained on staff for two years after her refusal and then resigned to raise a family [ibid., p. 341].

For women in postwar Alberta, many of the doors that had been briefly opened slammed shut again, and in Pierson's words, "A sexual division of labour and a male/female hierarchy of authority re-emerged unscathed" [ibid., p. 2]. As a researcher, I regret that this topic was not raised more frequently by me or the women in my study. However, I did discuss the impact of the war on women with Peggy over coffee. Her final comment: "Well, at least we got the right to wear pants in public!"

4.5.3 Canada After the War

Under the stable Liberal government of Mackenzie King, Canada emerged from World War II with enhanced international prestige and a growing confidence as a nation. Re-elected in 1945, King moved away from his wartime fiscal conservatism and initiated government spending on both industrial projects and social programs (Corcoran and Marks, 1996). In addition to the continuing development of primary industries, new developments were undertaken in electronic, chemical, aeronautic and nuclear engineering. The value of manufactured Canadian goods increased 250 percent between 1946 and 1957. The Liberals won a major victory under Louis St. Laurent in 1949, a year which saw the beginning of the Trans-Canada Highway, the welcoming of Newfoundland into Confederation and Canadian membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The post-war economic explosion in Canada was also fueled by the returning veterans and more than 1.5 million immigrants, mainly from Britain and other European countries. The veterans were eager to spend money on their homes and families while the immigrants, many of them skilled workers, provided both cheap labour and an additional body of consumers. The Military Rehabilitation Program granted ex-service personnel re-establishment credits which allowed them to purchase clothing, farm equipment, domestic appliances or even a down payment on a new home. Jim was a part of that group:

> **We were quartered at the air base, and it was a good collegial thing that we had. The vets were an interesting group, and I think we set a pretty high standard at the university, at Corbett Hall. We meant business and really pushed the marks and the grades because, you know, we had to graduate and get on with our life and we were pretty serious about it and we were late starting. [Jim, # 1, 1997 11 04]**

The war-delayed nesting instinct of many young Canadians resulted in a sharp increase in both the marriage rate and domestic spending. This trend was enthusiastically supported by the popular press, with advertisements and articles on wedding plans and hints on how to ensure marital bliss with "your returning hero". The wave of immigration combined with the post-war baby boom increased Canada's population from just over twelve million in 1945 to almost sixteen million in 1955.

Even the naysayers were forced to admit that Canada had not faced the problems which arose at the end of World War I. The million returning veterans had been smoothly assimilated back into the civilian economy and many new jobs had been created by post-war consumerism. In addition, both 1946 and 1947 had been bumper crop years for prairie farmers. Family Allowance and Unemployment Insurance had also extended the social safety net so that Canadians were less reluctant to purchase on credit a new car or washing machine. Gaffen provides a useful summary of this era:

> **As a country, Canada emerged from the Second World War quite transformed from what it had been in the 1930s. The war had acted as a catalyst for advances in material welfare, social security, and agricultural and industrial productivity. A skilled work force had been created, and remote areas of the country were to be further explored and developed by those from more populated areas. [ibid., 1998, p. 9]**

4.6 Life and Education in Alberta (1945 - 1955)

As mentioned in Chapter One, nine of my ten research participants began their teaching careers in the decade immediately following the Second World War. (Margaret, the exception, started teaching in September, 1939, the same week that Germany invaded Poland.) The history of Alberta from 1945 to 1955 is therefore of special interest to me as an educational researcher.

Albertans, like most Canadians, had been greatly affected by the war. One of the greatest areas of change was in the rural life style which had characterized the province since its inception. The transformation was brought about by the migration of families from farm to city. As Chalmers (1967) informs us, a scarcity of farm labour during the war had given "an immense impetus to rural mechanization, with a consequent decline in rural population" [p. 123].

By 1946, there was one tractor for every two farms in Alberta and over ten percent of the 84,350 farms had combines (Palmer, 1990, p. 286). Larger farms were needed to economically use the expensive machinery, and one by one the small farms and towns that had dotted the prairie landscape began to disappear. As a result, from 1941 to 1961, the average acreage of Alberta farms increased from 460 to 645 and by the 1971 census the figure was close to 800 acres per farm [Statistics Canada]. The family farm was no longer a way of life; it was a business.

From 1940 to 1945 over a thousand one-room schools closed their doors forever in Alberta, as the percentage of the population defined as rural dropped from a pre-depression figure of eighty-seven percent to fifty-eight percent by 1946. The consolidation of school districts, which had been initiated during the depression for economic reasons, was now hastened by the economy of scale offered by larger school divisions. Improved roads throughout the province enabled districts to develop bus transportation systems that could bring farm children into the better-equipped town schools. Consequently, the need for additional classroom space in the towns and cities of Alberta became critical in the first decade after the Second World War. Even the existing school classrooms were in poor condition, as depression weary (and wary) school districts had spent very little money on school maintenance during the war years.

In addition to a scarcity of school accommodation, the teacher shortage situation was also reaching a critical point. Many of the teachers who left their classrooms to enlist never returned, preferring instead to utilize their veteran allowances to upgrade their qualifications or to take one of the many new jobs available in the cities of Alberta. The married or retired teachers who had been coerced by desperate school superintendents into returning to the classrooms to fill the gap were anxious to get back to farm and family life now that the war was over.

As a result, the number of Alberta elementary and junior high school students on correspondence reached 14,163 by 1947. In his 1947 Annual Report, Deputy Minister of Education W.H. Swift indicated that there were 24 schools with no service, 24 operating under "makeshift, co-operative arrangements" and 489 under uncertificated correspondence course supervisors [p. 9]. The Department of Education searched everywhere for qualified teachers and managed to issue 1085 new teaching certificates in 1946 alone. This was not enough. Nor could the newly established Faculty of Education keep up. In 1947, Dean Lazerte reported that enrolment in the Faculty of Education at the

University of Alberta now exceeded 1000 students, including 335 in the one-year program, and 503 in the "full" program, the vast majority of whom would complete their third and fourth years through Summer School. Pauline was one of the first students to enroll in the new faculty:

> **We were the first class after the university took over teacher training. We were a very special class. We were the war emergency class. It actually had two streams. One group started in September and they went out to teach in January, so, they would have the equivalent of four months training. I was in the group that finished in April. [Pauline, Interview 1 1997 07 28]**

Even when rural school districts could hire the newly certified teachers, they had difficulty in keeping them. For example, the 1946 graduating class for the one-year program included nearly 100 veterans, but by 1951 more than two thirds of them had left the profession. Wartime experience had given the young men and women of Alberta new confidence in their abilities and opened up new possibilities for the future. Jim, who had served in both the army and the air force, is a typical example:

> **After I joined the air force, I came up to Edmonton, and did the aptitude test, and was told that I would be best suited to be a wireless air gunner because I had this great da-da-dit ability. I said, no, I want to be a pilot, and I kept insisting on that, and damned if I didn't get to be a pilot. So, that did me a lot of good personally... I found myself, and lots of guys found themselves as individual personalities and career people because of the war. [Jim, Interview # 1, 1997 11 07]**

Women were also looking at other career paths than the traditional roles of nurse and teacher. Many of them had regarded these two professions as the only "escape routes" from the exhausting - and for many women unfulfilling - life as a farm wife. Prior to the war, the few jobs available for women in the urban areas were domestic positions, which were little improvement over what they were leaving behind. The war was to change all that. Thousands of clerical positions, both in and out of the armed forces, became available as men were needed for the front. Banks, department stores and business offices were eager to have this cadre of efficient and reliable workers continue in these positions after the war ended.

4.6.1 The Petro Boom Begins

Leduc # 1, 1947

As if this combination of factors was not enough to create a growing shortage of teachers in the province, on February 13, 1947, Leduc No. 1 blew in. Despite the excitement, few were able to predict the impact that this oil discovery was to have not only on Alberta but the country as a whole. Most historians agree that the post-war discoveries of gas and oil in Alberta were responsible for much of the political and social change that occurred in this province. As MacGregor (1972) has put it:

> **Just as fifty years earlier Alberta's rich soils had proven to be a paradise for thousands of farmers, the province's oil resources became a mecca for thousands of oil workers. Within the next twenty-four years Alberta's population doubled to some 1,600,000. Farming, with some slight assists from coal and lumber, had supported 800,000 people. Twenty-four years later, by 1971, petroleum products directly or indirectly supported almost as many more. For in that quarter century everything good (plus much that was bad) happened to Alberta. [1972, p. 287]**

The "flight from the farm" in Alberta was now well under way as thousands of young Albertans took advantage of the jobs created by the extracting and refining of petroleum. Edmonton grew rapidly into an industrial and refining centre and the major supplier of the service industries which grew up around the oil patch. Calgary, on the other hand, was developing into the province's financial and business hub, while continuing to serve as the major commercial centre for the agriculture of the south. Both cities increased in population from roughly 100,000 in 1946 to over 400,000 in 1971 [Palmer, 1990, p. 307]. Even those who remained on the farm were anxious to take advantage of the city's amenities, and the 1971 census reported that there was one car in Alberta for every three of its citizens. Not everyone, however, benefited from the changes occurring in the province, as urban growth frequently created rural catastrophe. As MacGregor (1972) tell us,

> **much of the new prosperity came at the expense of nearby smaller towns and villages which, because of their paved highways and everyone's new mobility, had to watch their businesses close up when former customers passed them by on their way to the larger towns or even to cities a hundred miles away. [p. 289]**

Alberta, in the two decades following the war was the only prairie province to experience a net growth through natural increase and net migration. Although some of population growth in Alberta may be attributed to activity associated with the construction of the Alaska Highway, oil and gas are primarily responsible for the significant variance among the Prairie Provinces. [See Table 2]

Table 2. Population Change in the Prairie Provinces by Natural Growth and Net Migration.

1941-61

Interval	Population Change	Manitoba	Saskatchewan	Alberta
1941-51	Natural Increase	70,340	135,106	150,303
	Net Migration	-28,960	-199,370	-6,971
1951-56	Natural Increase	73,684	86,030	120,961
	Net Migration	-185	-37,093	62,654
1956-61	Natural Increase	76,006	86,294	144,234
	Net Migration	-4,360	-41,528	64,594

Source: Statistics Canada, Series A339-3

The population explosion had the greatest impact on Alberta's two major cities. Stamp (1975) reports that fifty-eight new schools were constructed in Calgary between 1945 and 1960, while Kostek (1992) lists sixty-five schools opened in Edmonton during the same period. The 1947 Alberta Education Report indicates there were 155,537 students in the province; by 1955 that number had grown to 234,397. Despite the injection of petrodollars into the economy, the Alberta Government was hard pressed to keep up. In 1952, the School Borrowing Assistance Act was passed to help school districts meet the ever-growing demand for new classrooms. War surplus items - including entire buildings - were recycled into the schools to offset the need for everything from paper towels to public address systems.

It was an exciting time to be entering the teaching profession in Alberta, and there was no shortage of positions available. In fact, Kostek (1992) records that "In 1947, for the first time in the history of the Board, the superintendent requested permission to recruit inexperienced teachers for the Edmonton Public School System" [p. 346]. Previously, the District had hired only teachers with three years successful experience elsewhere unless they were one of the two top graduates from normal school. "Jack", one of the teachers I interviewed during the pilot phase of my study, shared the following anecdote with me:

> **My wife and I both graduated from the Junior E in the same year- 1946 - although she was in the Fall class and I didn't finish up 'til the spring. Anyway, we had more job offers than you could shake a stick at. We decided we didn't mind where we went - as long as it was away from Edmonton and her parents, so we put them all in the hat and drew one out. We ended up in Holden District # 17 and stayed there fourteen years. Her mother only visited us twice! [Interview, 1997 04 12]**

Many rural districts offered a bursary to help cover the costs of training in the one year program, with the proviso that the new teacher would return to their home district after they received their certificate. In a time of teacher shortage combined with the lure of the city, the bursary was a clever strategy, and six of my ten research participants took advantage of the offer. Despite the expanding economy, money was in short supply, and parents were quick to encourage their children to take the bursary rather than apply for a loan. School Superintendents were also key players in the recruitment process, as the following excerpt from Anne's 1997 story, "Blue Hill", indicates:

> **When we returned from our holiday in Ontario, the department results were in the mail, as well as a letter from Mr. Kunelius congratulating me on my success in passing all my courses and offering me a $300 bursary, plus paying the tuition at the University for a year of teacher training. There was no question in my mind that I would accept this offer. I considered myself very lucky. [Anne Rasmussen]**

4.6.2 "Look out world, here I come!"

In this section, I have tried to present the reader with a comprehensive picture of life in Alberta in the decade following the Second World War. As Gleason (1997) has reminded us, the notion that the 1950's marked a high point of social optimism, prosperity, naiveté and innocence obscures many of the era's complexities and reveals our tendency to look back on this particular period with nostalgic eyes [p. 450]. It was a period of both enormous social and economic change, as well as one of political constancy, both federally and provincially. Mackenzie King had emerged from the war years still firmly in control, the only war time leader to do so other than Stalin. King resigned and was replaced as Prime Minister in Ottawa by Louis St. Laurent in 1948, and the Liberals remained in control until the Conservative sweep in 1957 under John Diefenbaker.

Provincially, a similar passing of the leadership baton occurred when, after Aberhart's death in 1943, the leadership of the Social Credit government was assumed by Ernest Manning. Manning remained as Premier until his retirement in 1968, and the Socreds continued in power until defeated by Peter Lougheed's Conservatives in 1971. Although the province had largely recovered from the ravages of the Great Depression, it had left its mark on the population.

> **I think it's fair to say the Depression left its mark on all of us, but I don't think it affected me in the same way as my parents. They never got over it. My grandfather had three sons, and only my Dad continued to farm after the War. His Dad died in 1944 and Grandma passed away right after the war ended. They just wore out. My uncles all said, ' No way!' and moved into town or the city. [Jack, Pilot Interview, 1997 04 12]**

Gerald Friesen (1987) has referred to Alberta as "Canada's Cinderella" in the post-war decades. "Nowhere," he claims, "was growth so rapid, the increase in wealth so obvious, the atmosphere of confidence so palpable." [p. 427] This sense of optimism is quite evident in the stories of my ten research participants as they launch their teaching careers in Northern Alberta [See Table 3]
As Alice remarked over coffee: "It was a great time to be alive, and you felt like you could accomplish anything. It was "Look out world, here I come!'"

Table 3. Age, Status and Location of the Ten Research Participants In 1955

Name of Teacher	Age	Years in Teaching	School District	School	Grade
Anne	24	2	Westlock	Flatbush School	1-3
Peggy	26	3	Devon	Devon School	2
Pauline	27	8	Rochester	Rochester School	3/4
Mary	23	4	Thorhild	Thorhild School	2
Margaret	34	14	Blackfoot Reserve	Old Sun Residential	2
Alice	22	2	Edmonton Public	Crestwood School	3/4
Jim	39	4	Edmonton Public	Prince Charles	5
Gerry	25	2	Edmonton Public	Windsor Park	3
Glenn	28	1st	Edmonton Public	Mill Creek	3
Thor	21	1st	Wetaskiwin	Rosebriar School	6-8

4.7 The Sixties and Seventies

Alberta's Cinderella story continued into the next two decades with no end in sight to the economic prosperity. Not only did the oil industry continue to expand with the discovery of a major new oil field at West Pembina and the beginning of the development of the Athabasca tar sands, but there were major natural gas discoveries in the province as well. To supply these new industries, Alberta required a highly skilled workforce and both the Social Credit and Conservative governments of this period were quick to respond. In 1960, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) was opened, followed by the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) in 1962. Palmer reports that by 1966, NAIT was the largest technical institute in Canada with 6000 students enrolled. The same decade saw the establishment of the University of Calgary as a separate degree granting institution in 1966, and the opening of the University of Lethbridge in 1967. Meanwhile, the University of Alberta increased its student population from 5000 students in 1959 to 17, 500 in 1969 [ibid., p. 311].

As the graduates emerged from these institutions, the social, political and cultural landscape of Alberta began to change. Tomkins (1992) indicates that by 1971, the arts in Canada were being supported by governments "on a per capita scale almost ten times that of the United States" [p. 269]. Canadian attendance at cultural venues now rivaled attendance at sporting events, and museums, planetariums and art galleries sprang up everywhere. The negative side of this cultural explosion was reflected in parental and societal concerns over the growing influence of television on the lives of children, a decline in church attendance and fears about the "hippie drug culture " being imported from the United States.

On the political front, the desire for change was reflected in the 1968 federal election results in Alberta when Pierre Trudeau's Liberals captured 35 percent of the Alberta vote and four of the nineteen provincial seats. In the wake of Expo '67, "Trudeaumania" was sweeping the country, although Alberta's attraction to the Federal Liberals would be short-lived, as the struggle for control of the oil and natural gas revenues worsened with the rapid rise in oil prices in the '70s.

At the Provincial level, Peter Lougheed and his Conservative Party took forty-nine of seventy-five seats and ended the thirty-six year Social Credit dynasty. Albertans were looking for a change, and businessmen replaced educators in the Legislative Assembly. As Palmer (1992) has noted, the Socreds were victims of their own success:

> **The Conservative victory marked the consolidation of social, demographic, and economic changes that had rapidly transformed Alberta in the postwar era. Social Credit had little chance of surviving in a society that was increasingly urban, middle-class, affluent, and secular. Ironically, Social Credit presided over and encouraged the affluence, high rates of urbanization, interprovincial migration, and high levels of education that ultimately undermined its base of support. [p. 324]**

Lougheed's new government shared the optimism of most of the province. MacGregor reports that the 1971 budget totalled 1.2 billion dollars - twice the sum total of all previous budgets from 1905 to 1947 [ibid., p. 303]. The provincial Conservatives were determined to make Alberta a major player in Western development and a significant presence on the national stage for the first time in Canadian history. To do so, they believed it would be necessary to provide major economic incentives to private industry and financial support for a number of provincial 'mega-projects'. Nevertheless, forty million dollars in that 1971 budget was earmarked for social development in the province, and Health, Education, and Social Welfare improvements were high on the list of priorities.

Perhaps the most significant and far-reaching change that occurred during the sixties and seventies was in the relationship between the sexes. During this era, women in Canadian and Albertan society began to achieve some of the social and economic freedoms that had been denied them in the decade immediately following the Second World War. The 1967 Royal Commission on the Status of Women had raised awareness levels of women across the country of how sexist attitudes and institutions "shaped their lives and limited their opportunities" [Palmer, ibid. p. 319].

This "raised awareness", however, did not apply to the political situation in Alberta. In the 1965 provincial elections, only two out of 65 seats went to women. By 1970, the number was down to one, Ethel Wilson, Minister without Portfolio in the Strom cabinet. To the disappointment of many, despite the fact that there were now seventy-five seats in the legislature, the "New Look" Conservative Party had fielded only four female candidates in the 1971 election. When the results were in, only two of the women, Catherine Chichak and Helen Huntley had been elected.

In rural Alberta, farm women were becoming more involved in the family business, while in the towns and cities, the emergence of the two income family meant women worked outside of the home and continued to do so while raising their families. Despite their increased presence in the work force, issues of equality in terms of pay, advancement and representation in the professions remained major stumbling blocks for women. As Middleton and May (1997a) indicates

> **By the mid-1970s, education had become pivotal in the resurgence of feminism. The daughters of the post-World War baby boom were the first generation of young women to have had universal access to secondary schools and significant opportunities to take up higher education. However, they found their sex rendered invisible or marginal in many curricula...and seldom achieved the most senior positions in the teaching profession. [p. 216]**

4.7.1 The Changing Role of the Schools

All of these social changes had a major impact on the school system. Tomkins (1986) suggests that the large-scale entry of women, most of them married, into the work force had a number of implications for schools in the sixties and seventies.

> **The resulting emergence of the two-income family and of mothers working outside the home had profound consequences for Canadian lifestyles. This trend resulted in greater demands for day care and early childhood educational provision... The greater persistence of traditional marriage and family patterns than was popularly supposed was countered by the growth of single parent families, which became a noticeable feature of Canadian society for the first time. [p. 266]**

Edmonton Public responded to the demand for early childhood education by opening up an 'experimental' kindergarten program at Oliver School. Although the Board had authorized kindergarten programs as early as 1913, these were discontinued as an austerity measure in 1921 [Kostek, ibid., p. 140]. However, by the mid-1970s these programs were the norm, not the exception, across the province. Mary, one of the retired teachers in my study was given the opportunity to establish the first Kindergarten program at High Park School in 1974:

> **It certainly was one of the highlights of my career. This was the year of universal Kindergartens in Alberta, and I can still remember how excited I was and how my whole family pitched in to help me get the room ready. In fact the whole community was involved. I received, at my many requests, excellent parental involvement in building, painting, sewing, arranging and creating multitudes of learning materials. Parents were heroes in their participation and as I mobilized help, hardly anyone refused. We achieved tasks according to the strengths and specialties that each parent had, from working on the Local Advisory Committee, to phoning and making snack arrangements, to daily participation in our multi-faceted learning program. [From "The High Park Kindergarten" a story by Mary Wasylyk.]**

In many ways, the Sixties and Seventies were confusing times for educators, and the teachers in my study were no exception. In the Fifties, concerns had been raised across Canada regarding the efficacy of progressive education. The 1951 report of the Massey Commission accused Canadian Educators of an over-reliance on American curriculum materials and educational practices which contributed to the country's "cultural annexation" [p.16]. The Massey Report was followed by a savage criticism of the negative influence progressivism was having on Canadian education. In her popular 1953 publication, *So Little for the Mind,* Hilda Neatby, a Massey Commissioner, argued that Dewey's ideas were " anti-intellectual" and "anti-cultural" and made "no attempt to exercise, train and discipline the mind." Although Neatby supported the idea of more participative education and a move away from "rote learning", she felt there was a need to return to a focus on "critical thinking" and "character education" (cited in Wilson et al., 1970, p. 407).

The period also saw a flurry of provincial Royal Commissions on Education, including all of the Western Provinces. These ranged from the extremely conservative British Columbia Chant Commission in 1960 to the neo-progressivist views of Alberta's Worth Commission in 1972. The conflicting policy trends represented by these studies and the minority reports that accompanied them were, in Tomkin's words, "less the application of thought-out philosophies or rational solutions than desperate responses to public and political pressures" [Ibid., p. 279]. Thor, in our third interview together, also commented succinctly on the difficulty teachers had in making sense of educational policy in this era:

> **I'm just trying to recall what was going on, whether there was any kind of direction, and I say in the Sixties, particularly, I felt there was less structure, more do it your own way, do your own thing, everybody flying by the seat of their pants sort of a thing. And there were a lot of kites seemed to come over, and everybody jumped at every kite. [Thor: Interview # 3: 1998 07 02]**

None of the teachers in my study could recall feeling a sense of direction or overall educational philosophy during this part of their careers. Some reported that they were just too busy teaching. Others recall prolonged staff meetings and a flurry of paper from Central Office, but felt very little really changed in the classroom as a consequence. "I taught the way those around me were teaching" said Peggy " and we sort of learned from each other." Alice, for example, was too busy enjoying her new open area school to worry about "trends" in education:

> **I never felt during my years at Richard Secord, (including my several years as an Integrated Language Arts Project teacher) that there was a world outside brewing with a back-to-basics fervour. We were on the cusp of the Integrated Language Arts and I don't remember ever looking back. I was very happy 'pushing the envelope' (Alice, email response, 1999 10 30).**

Gerry was aware of changes "coming down the pipe" but felt the needs of the children had to come first:

> **There were changes going on all the time. You had to keep checking back to see that you were meeting the curriculum requirements. You could get off base different times, but if the children were interested in something and they were really involved, it was fine. I didn't worry about district or provincial testing either. The children could handle those quite well if you had followed the curriculum and worked through the basics. [Gerry, Interview # 3, 1998 06 30]**

Perhaps one of the reasons the teachers in my study seemed unaware of major shifts in educational philosophy during the Sixties and Seventies was that no clear policy emerged at this time from the Alberta Department of Education or the province's three universities. Some senior education officials expressed concern over the fads that were creeping into education, and urged a return to basics so that the next generation could 'keep up with the Russians'. Others, citing the Worth Report, were convinced of the need to make the Alberta Curriculum more "child-centred" and advocated a "values education" system based on the work of Piaget (1960) and Kohlberg (1975). At the university level, teacher educators, many of them transferees from the normal schools, continued to advocate a Deweyan approach to teaching, while others cited Bruner's (1960) oft-quoted statement that "any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development" [p. 14]. Cuban (1993), commenting on the open school movement in North America, suggests it was often difficult to keep up with the pedagogical shifts that were occurring in education:

> **Compared to earlier reform efforts, the brevity of interest in informal schooling was astonishing. The movement is generally considered to have begun in the mid-1960's; by the mid-1970's, concerns for basic skills, test scores...and minimum competencies had replaced open classrooms on the agendas of school boards, superintendents, principals and teachers. [p. 53]**

For many teachers in this era, the solution was to stay focused on the perceived needs of the children in their classroom, and wait for the pendulum to swing back again. By 1970, all of the teachers in my study had fifteen or more years of teaching or administrative experience and felt confident in making their own decisions about what was best for children. Here are Jim's reflections as a principal at that time:

> **I know there was a laid-on course of studies that we were supposed to follow. In the fall you made a big deal about everybody picking up their curriculum bulletins from the department of education. Teachers put them in their desks and I don't think they were ever opened again. I don't remember exactly what I did about those kinds of things. I hope I didn't belabour them. I probably did. [Jim # 1, 1997 11 04]**

The lack of consensus over educational reform and philosophy can be illustrated by the contrasting views of open area schools held by two of the teachers in my study. Both began teaching in 1953 after training at the University of Alberta, and both retired in Edmonton after more than three decades in the classroom. Note, however, their respective comments about teaching in an open area school.

> **I was quite happy to see walls go up in the 1970's. It was much easier working with your children. The other children, from other classrooms, can be a bit of a disturbance for your class, but when you do get a wall up, you then have the attention of your children. I liked to close the door, and then at noon time, I could meet with the other people and look at some of the other problems that had risen. [Gerry, Interview # 3, 1998 06 30]**

> **I was so lucky to be assigned to an open-area school and I found the atmosphere most invigorating. Working with other teachers was great, learning from each other was great, being asked to present workshops to other teachers was great, everything was open, the feeling was learn, learn, do, do, and try new things...They put the walls up now, in Richard Secord and when I go back, my heart just cries. I think, why did you do that? It was working so well. [Alice, Interview # 3, 1998 06 20]**

The contrasting views of these two teachers helps to illustrate how idiosyncratic a profession teaching really is. The lack of clear direction for teachers in this era only enhanced that individuality. As will become clear in the next two chapters of this dissertation, the teachers in my study made very few changes over the course of their careers which could be related to major revisions in provincial curriculum or North American educational philosophy.

As Table 4 indicates, in 1965, all of the teachers in my study were well into their careers with a decade or more of teaching experience. It is interesting to note how the postwar pattern of migration from country to city is reflected in the life histories of these ten teachers as well. In 1950, at the end of the war, only two of the ten were working or living in Edmonton; by 1970, only Pauline was teaching outside of the Greater Edmonton area.

Table 4. Age, Status and Location of the Ten Research Participants in 1965

Name of Teacher	Age	Years of Teaching	District	School	Grade
Anne	34	12	Edmonton Public	Youngstown	4
Peggy	36	13	Calgary Public	Knob Hill	3
Pauline	37	*18	Rochester	Rochester School	5/6
Mary	32	*14	Thorhild	Thorhild School	2
Margaret	44	*24	Edmonton Public	High Park School	4
Alice	32	*10	Edmonton Public	Crestwood School	4
Jim	49	14	Edmonton Public	McQueen School	Principal
Gerry	35	12	Edmonton Public	Avonmore School	7
Glenn	38	10	Edmonton Public	Capilano School	3
Thor	31	10	Edmonton Public	McKay Avenue	** P.E.P

*This figure has been adjusted to exclude time off taken to raise a family.

** Pre Employment Program (students 15 years of age and 2 years behind in school)

4.8 The Sobering Eighties

"Lord, give us one more oil boom and we promise not to piss it away this time."

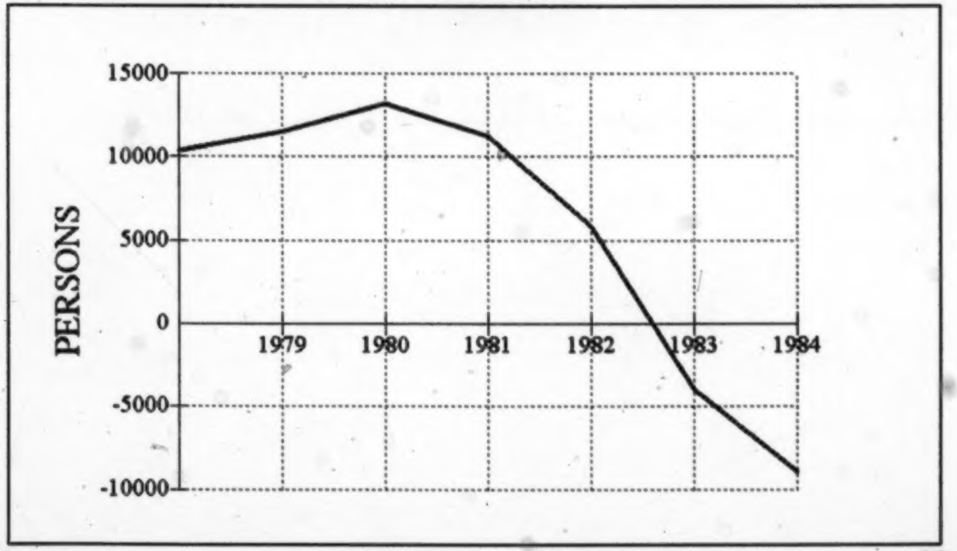
Alberta bumper sticker, circa 1984

The conflict over whom would control oil and gas production in Canada came to a head in 1980 when the newly elected Trudeau government introduced their National Energy Policy. The intent of this policy was to keep control of the energy resources in Canada in Canadian hands. The federal government established a Crown Corporation, Petro Canada, and set domestic oil and natural gas prices up to 30 percent below world price levels. Albertans saw this as beneficial to eastern Canadian industry but a disaster to the local economy. Some analysts have estimated that between 1981 and 1986 - the year after the Mulroney government finally removed the NEP - Alberta lost nearly $50 Billion in revenue (Cox, 1987, p. 37).

The situation for Alberta's farmers was equally grim. By the mid-1980's, there was a glut of wheat in the world grain markets. Producing countries, including Canada, responded to the crisis with price subsidies, fuel rebates and short term loans. Tragically, by 1986 farmers were selling crops that cost them $160 a tonne to produce for $110 a tonne on the world market. As Nikiforuk (1987) has indicated, the government had become a more important source of income for farmers than the export market [p. 51]. Even though by the mid-80's agriculture was contributing less than ten percent of the province's revenue, plummeting grain prices combined with severe drought in southern Alberta brought back grim memories for farmers of the Great Depression, and wheat prices remained an important component of the prairie psyche.

Nevertheless, the province had become heavily dependent on oil and gas revenues, and in 1983, unemployment in Alberta broke through the psychologically significant ten percent barrier. Families that had arrived during the boom years left to seek work elsewhere, and the province which had seen a net migration to Alberta in 1980 of 42,242 individuals from other parts of Canada experienced a net loss in 1984 of 33, 579. I have constructed the following graph based on Statistics Canada data to illustrate both the rapidity of change in this era and the eventual impact on the schools of Alberta.

Figure 2: Net Migration of Persons Less Than 17 Years of Age to Alberta 1978-1984



4.8.1 Teaching During the Recession Years in Alberta

For educators, the 1980's were characterized by restricted budgets and an expanded curriculum. After two decades of unprecedented growth, districts were faced with declining enrolments. The Conservative government in Alberta, now headed by Premier Don Getty, implemented an austerity program that had serious consequences for the classrooms across the province. The emphasis was on "doing more with less" and teachers struggled with larger class sizes and increased responsibilities for special needs children. Donald Wilson (1987) has summarized the period nicely:

> **Retrenchment became the order of the day. From a point where there seemed to be money for buildings, teacher's salaries, educational research and such like, all of a sudden the well seemed to have run dry. [p. 205]**

Jim was the first of the teachers in my study to retire, ending his career in 1979 after twenty-eight years of service. As a result, he was to miss a return in the 80's to the educational conservatism of the 50's. According to Tomkins (1986) the 80's were epitomized by a back to the basics movement accompanied by a demand for the 'recentralization' of authority in curriculum and increased emphasis on teacher supervision [p. 315]. These trends were still in evidence when the last of my ten research participants, Thor, retired in 1994.

As a consequence, at the very time in their lives when these teachers should be enjoying the winding down of successful and satisfying careers, they were experiencing a period of considerable stress. Teachers like Alice, who had not been formally evaluated in thirty years, were suddenly faced not with a one-time dutiful visit from the School Inspector, but the invasion of her classroom by a panel of experts trained in clinical supervision techniques. Not only were they under closer scrutiny than they had been since the beginning of their careers, but several felt pressure by administrators (and colleagues!) to "pack it in" and make way for a younger - and less expensive - replacement. For some, the result was retirement earlier than planned.

> **I thought, if some of us don't retire, these young people aren't going to get jobs. I don't know why I really did. I just made up my mind, well, I've had 35 years in, I guess I should get out. I felt we've got to make room...But I can't say I didn't want to teach anymore. [Gerry, Interview # 1, 1997 11 14]**

> **One of the final things that pushed me over was hearing people say, 'Well, there's so many young people just out of university, they need jobs. These older people should be getting out of there.' And I thought, 'Okay, I'm going to get a pension, I'll get out.' That's not a very logical reason. I mean, it's supposed to be a noble kind of a reason, isn't it? [Pauline, Interview 3]**

Although I have quoted only two of the retirees here, similar reasons for retirement were expressed by four other teachers in my study.

4.9 Summary: On Constructing a History

As only Thor was still in the profession after 1991, and at that point he had been a principal for many years, I will end my historical overview with the 1980s. The impact on education of the cutbacks implemented by Ralph Klein's Conservative government will be a story for someone else to tell.

While writing this chapter, I found myself regretting the fact that I had not researched the historical background for my study *before* I conducted my interviews. After reviewing the events that served as a backdrop to the personal and professional stories of my research participants, I now have a much better understanding of how history has impacted on their individual lives. There are many questions that a more well informed interviewer or trained historian would have thought to ask as he listened to their recollections of life in and around the classroom - questions which would have supplied greater understanding as to how and why they arrived at the personal and professional decisions which shaped their respective careers.

In this chapter, I have tried to reveal some of those connections between historical events and personal courses of action. At times, the event precipitating the action was one that occurred on a national scale: Jim's decision to enlist is a good example. Other actions were triggered by small, relatively insignificant happenings, like Pauline returning to teaching rather than continue in the city at the five and ten - simply because she forgot to resign the previous June. Still others were 'spur of the moment' decisions; e.g., Thor's response to the offer of a bursary from Superintendent Ericson while cleaning the Sparling School basement. On the other hand, Margaret's decision to take early retirement and teach for the United Church in Japan is a good example of a choice made after the intersection of several key factors: a new, aggressive and unsympathetic administrator, the resulting shift to the basement classroom of a less desirable school, a general feeling of "unwantedness", and the sudden need for self-promotion after many years of dedicated and exemplary service to the local board. All these factors coincided with a personal call to serve her church in a way that was only possible because of her teaching experience and training. It was interesting to note that during (and sometimes days after) the interviews, it was not uncommon for one of the teachers in my study to suddenly make one of these life history connections for themselves, resulting in new insight into the underlying reasons for a particular path being followed. These self-discoveries are, I believe, consistent with Smyth's (1989) observation that "Our experiences as teachers have meaning for us in terms of our own historically located consciousness; what we need to do is work at articulating that consciousness in order to interpret meaning" [p. 4-5].

I had originally intended this chapter as background material only. However, as I began to construct a history of the events that provide the context for my study, it seemed important to begin to make connections to the life histories of the retired teachers who have contributed to my research. I also discovered that although there were many differences in the personal histories of my research participants, some of their stories shared common elements that offered new insight into the profession. As Carr (1961), in *What is History,* has explained

> **The facts of history are facts about individuals, but not about actions of individuals performed in isolation, and not about the motives, real or imaginary, from which individuals suppose themselves to have acted. They are facts about the relations of individuals to one another in society and about the social forces which produce from the actions of individuals results often at variance with, and sometimes opposite to, the results which they themselves intended. [p. 54]**

CHAPTER FIVE: BECOMING A TEACHER

> *Nothing I have ever learned of value was taught to me by an ogre.*
> *Nothing do I regret more in life than that my teachers were not my friends.*
>
> J.T. Dillon

Introduction

I was fortunate late in my review of the literature to discover a thesis by Kelleher (1999) which utilized life history methodology to investigate the life experiences of 'ordinary' teachers both in and out of the classroom. Although the three teachers in her study were not retired, I was particularly interested in Kelleher's discussion on the relationship between a teacher's childhood experiences and their subsequent performance as a teaching professional. She notes that her study confirms the work of Knowles (1992) in that many of a teacher's classroom decisions are shaped by the teacher's own experiences as a student. Kelleher's conclusions are also consistent with the findings of Cortazzi (1993) that childhood influences can have a greater impact on teaching than professional preparation.

In this chapter, I examine the early life history of each of the ten retired teachers included in my thesis and compare the results with the work of a number of earlier studies. The reader is provided with a brief biography of each of the ten research participants from their early childhood until their first teaching position. Each of their life histories will be continued in the chapters that follow.

I have also identified the events and circumstances that influenced their decision to choose teaching as a profession. The reconstruction of the early life histories of my research subjects illustrates how their childhood home and school experiences helped to shape the type of teacher they eventually became.

5.1 Alice Halvorsen: Downhill to School

Elizabeth Alice Chychul was born in Myrnam, Alberta, on September 25,1933. She is the daughter of Ukrainian immigrants who farmed for a living. Alice describes her parents as very "down to earth", hard working people with very little money.

> **We had just enough so that we could get people coming in to help out; my father couldn't finish the harvest on his own. My uncle had this great big thresher, and a whole bunch of men would come, and my mom would cook, and I would have fun, especially with my cousins, jumping into the wheat in the wheat bins and almost drowning. [Alice, Interview # 1, 1997 07 08]**

Despite their limited education, Alice's parents worked hard to create a literate environment at home.

> **My mom sang to me and my dad read to me in Ukrainian. He subscribed to the Winnipeg Free Press, and he would read me stories from it meant for children. We also got the Toronto Star Weekly, and there were always comics around that my brother had, and I would get into them, and I would get into his homework. [ibid.]**

Alice recalls a happy childhood, but at times a lonely one. Her only sibling, Nick, was eight years older and there were no suitable playmates close to the farm. As a result, she couldn't wait to start school.

> **I was dying to go to school because my brother was there. The Four Hills School was a half mile downhill from our farm. To go home, obviously, was uphill. I *loved* going downhill! When I was five, and I think the starting age for going to school in the Two Hills school division was six, my parents put me in school, and I got kicked out. After that, I was a holy terror at home, and about October I got back in. I don't know how my dad did it, but he got me back in school... I wasn't a very good girl at home, as I recall, always into mischief. But when I got to school that really settled me down because I had something to do. [ibid.]**

Alice and Nick Chychul, 1942

Alice's school memories are very positive, as she loved learning and especially reading. In fact, one of her clearest childhood memories is the day she learned to read.

> **I remember discovering how to put words together to make sentences. I was under a table at school, and the teacher was quite lax, I guess, and I was putting these cards together, and I was switching them around, and suddenly I could do it. I had absolutely no idea how I could do it, but from then on I could read. It just clicked, and I think that's what whole language is all about. I've always been a proponent of that kind of learning, I think, because I learned that way. [ibid.]**

At several points during the interview process, Alice commented on the relationship between her own experience in learning to read and her subsequent approach to teaching language and literature to her students:

> **Alice: Now, this may not be the right time to say it, but because I learned to read without any of those phonics related things. it never entered my own teaching. Maybe it was there but I didn't notice it. When I started teaching grade four in Bentley, I had to teach phonics, and I didn't know a vowel from a hole in the ground. I had been in secondary route, and I was so perplexed. It was so hard because the teacher's guide was expecting me to use those workbooks, and to manipulate words, and endings, and beginnings, and I found it totally useless.**
>
> **Ed: It wasn't your experience?**
>
> **Alice: No, it wasn't my experience, and it didn't really make the kids learn to read or write any better. That was my opinion. But it wasn't a verbalized opinion, it was just, it was like butting your head against the wall, and trying to come to grips with something that you should know how to do but you don't. You don't understand this whole thing about teaching reading through that method. [ibid.]**

Four Hills School had two classrooms, Grades 1 to 3 and 4 to 9. Alice did not share with me specific recollections of teachers from her primary years, but felt her own teaching was influenced by her Intermediate teacher, Mr. "S"

> **He taught using the Enterprise method, and I loved it. I was always very anxious to work on these reports with a title page, and so on, doing the research and putting it all together in a wonderful little booklet tied with ribbon. In my first years of teaching that's how I taught. I had the kids do the same kind of thing. [ibid.]**

Alice did recall one incident that occurred at Four Hills School, however, that was to have considerable influence on the way she disciplined students in her own classrooms.

> **Well, this is not a very good memory but it's important. We had magazines like the National Geographic in the classroom, and this friend of mine told me it would be all right to cut pictures out of this magazine. I thought maybe it wasn't right, but she said it was okay. So, I did it. And we got into such trouble with the teacher that he was going to strap us. I thought I would die if I got the strap, but after we explained, I didn't get strapped, and she didn't either. Now, that really made me respect that teacher because I thought, you know, he really listened to the reasonings [sic] behind what we had done, and could sense that we were really, really sorry. [ibid.]**

At the end of Grade 6, Alice moved to St. Paul where she completed Grades 7 to 12. Apparently, her secondary education was relatively uneventful, although Alice did indicate that her journals for this period mention a preoccupation with boys! However, it was during these adolescent years that Alice began to realize a need for order and precision in her life – a personality trait that, as a teacher, frequently competed with her desire to allow children freedom of thought and style in their creative endeavours. Here is part of our conversation on this topic.

> **Alice: I remember a book we had, can I still talk about the early years?**
>
> **Ed: You can talk about anything you like.**
>
> **Alice: Because these are things I've had in my heart, but not necessarily in my head. There was a story in one of the readers about changing a tire, and the spelling was t-y-r-e, and that bothered me immensely because it wasn't t-i-r-e. I keep looking for that story because it's a memory I have of how irritating it was to see a word not spelled the way it's supposed to be spelled. It didn't seem to bother anybody else, but it bothered me a lot.**
>
> **Ed: Why do you think it bothered you?**
>
> **Alice: Well, I think I was a good speller from the word go. I was anxious to do things the way they were supposed to be done, and my spelling was important... I like things to fall into place. I think that is a part of me. [ibid.]**

While completing her Grade 12 at St. Paul High, Alice received a letter from a former schoolmate which had a profound influence on her choice of profession.

> **I got a letter from a friend of mine who had been a year ahead of me at school, and she was teaching in Morinville. But she was not really teaching, she was supervising students on correspondence courses. Anyway, she wrote a letter to me which said, 'Dear Alice, here I sit in the classroom while the kids are working.' You know, da da da, and I go, hey! What kind of job would that be to be able to go to school, sit in a classroom, and write a letter? I'm going to university, Dad! So, I quickly finished off my high school, and went to university, got my standard 'S', went to teach, and I've never been able to write a letter in school. Never!**
>
> **E: What a wonderful story! So that's how you ended up a teacher?**
>
> **A: Well, I think I needed a push, you know. I knew I didn't want to be a nurse, and I knew I didn't want to be a secretary, and what else was there in those years? I probably wanted to be a teacher all along because I loved school. But that gave me the direction. [ibid.]**

From 1952 to 1954, Alice attended the University of Alberta and obtained her Standard S Teaching Certificate. Alice could not recall any specific instructors at the university that influenced her teaching, and felt that she really didn't appreciate the opportunity to learn during this stage of her teacher training.

> **I was green - as in I didn't know the ropes. If I had a paper to turn in on a certain day, I wouldn't start it 'till the night before. I was a terrible student. I guess things had been really easy for me at school, except for science, and I really didn't know anything about studying. When I went back to university in '66/'67, you wouldn't have recognized the same person. [ibid.]**

Although Alice may characterize herself as a 'terrible' student during her Standard S program, there is evidence that she was a careful observer. Alice still has the detailed notes she kept during her three rounds of practice teaching. Her notes include the following brief comment, made after spending ten hours in a Grade 3/4 class at McKernan School. The note suggests Alice was already considering teaching elementary - despite being enrolled in the secondary program.

> **Friday, February 5th, 1954. Finished. Hated to leave. Returned on February 14 to see Miss D. Class was having a Valentine's Day party. Very nice to be back. I missed them. [Alice's Practicum Notes, 1954]**

Her second round consisted of twenty hours at Ritchie Junior High, and contrasted badly with the elementary experience at McKernan.

> **You were asking me why I was teaching elementary, and I'd forgotten this, but when I practice taught junior high, they were such hoodlums, probably**

> **as bad as I was when I was in junior high. They were just not what I was about. I couldn't save the world using my efforts at the junior high level. That was that. [ibid.]**

After an additional eight hours at University High, where, she states, " I didn't like the way things were run", Alice realized that she was best suited for elementary teaching and ended up spending her entire career at that level.

Commentary

Alice Halvorsen epitomizes the life long learner. As we discover later in this thesis, she continues to be very involved in education. Despite their own limited opportunities for education, Alice's parents valued learning and ensured that their daughter was exposed at an early age to a literary environment. During my interviews with Alice, this passion for learning – especially literature – emerged as the defining characteristic of her teaching. She was an early adopter of the Whole Language Approach (Froese, 1996) and spent part of her career as a Language Arts Project Teacher. It is clear that Alice created what Woods (1984) has referred to as a 'teaching self' based upon the constructivist role of teacher as facilitator.

Alice's own experiences as a student in terms of classroom discipline also left their mark on her teaching. The restraint demonstrated by her teacher in the 'National Geographic' story represents a degree of tolerance and understanding she believes all teachers should demonstrate. Throughout the interviews, Alice continued to stress the need for teachers to listen to children and "not react until you've thought it through."

Although at times in her career she found it difficult to function in a 'noisy' and low structure classroom environment - perhaps because of her personal need for precision and order - Alice continued to allow her students freedom of choice and involvement in decision making, particularly in the areas of language and literacy. Alice was determined to provide children with the opportunity to discover things for themselves; in the same way that she learned to read under the table in the primary classroom of Four Hills School.

5.2 Thor Lerohl: Forgiveness, not Permission

Thor is the youngest of the ten teachers in my study and was the last to retire in 1994. He was born on October 29, 1934, the eldest of three boys, and grew up on a farm east of Millet, Alberta. Thor's parents were both well educated:

> **Education was important in our home. My mother had attended Camrose Lutheran College taking business training, and had worked in business in Wetaskiwin before she married. My dad came from Norway where he had gone through agricultural school so that he could farm. He'd also taken accounting, and been in the Queen's Guard before he came to Canada. [Thor, Interview # 1, 1997 10 29]**

Thor had a happy childhood and like Alice, has fond memories of the journey to school:

> **I attended Grades 1 through 7 at Sparling School, which was a mile and a half from home. Sometimes we walked or dad took us, but most of the time we rode our ponies to school. In the winter we'd put hay on the toboggan, and my younger brother used to ride on top of the hay to school. [ibid.]**

Thor could not recall any specific incidents or school memories from his elementary years at Sparling School, except for one teacher.

> **In my Grade 7 year, we had a young man from Edmonton as our teacher. This fellow gave out strappings regularly. He never strapped me, but he took me aside and threatened to beat the daylights out of me if I ever did whatever it was I did again... He certainly influenced me in that I always tried to make certain that people had positive experiences as a teacher on my staff, or as one of my students. I wanted to be a positive example rather than sitting with my feet up on the desk and yelling at kids...I can't recall his name but I remember how he made us feel. [Interview # 2, 1997 12 22]**

After completing his first seven years at Sparling, Thor started Grade 8 in Wetaskiwin. For Grades 8 to 10 he stayed with his grandmother during the week while he attended the Composite High School. In contrast to his elementary years at Sparling, Thor does have positive recollections of two of his teachers at Wetaskiwin Composite:

> **Thor: One of the teachers that I recall most fondly was May B. She was my Grade 9 teacher, and I can remember her pounding on the door and saying, 'no two things can occupy the same space as the molecules within this door.' I can recall her scaring the bejesus out of us when it was a fire drill because when she decided it was going to be a fire drill, she would grab the handbell off her desk, and run down the aisle in our classroom and**

> **through the rest of the school ringing this handbell. I also remember Roy L. who was my Grade 8 teacher and showed a great deal of personal interest in us.**
>
> **Ed: When you think back on these teachers, what do you see in yourself that might come from them?**
>
> **Thor: I see the excitement of running a school from May; the need for order and organization. In Roy I saw the caring about people. [ibid.]**

One of the most interesting stories Thor shared with me was how he decided to become a teacher. The incident tells us a great deal about his character.

> **In the summer of '54, one of the jobs I had was cleaning out the old Sparling school. Mr. Erickson, who was the superintendent of Wetaskiwin school division at that time, came by when I was scrubbing in the basement and said, 'What are you going to do now that you've finished your high school?' Well, I had no idea, just knew that I didn't want to be a farmer, and he said, 'Would you be interested if we gave you a bursary to go to the University of Alberta, take Junior E, and come back and teach for us?' And I said, 'Well, what does it entail?' And he said, 'Well, basically we'd pay you a $250.00 bursary, we'd pay your tuition, and you come and teach for us, for 2 years.' I said, 'It's done.' So, that's what happened.**
>
> **E: You didn't check with anyone? What did your parents say when you went home?**
>
> **T: Let's put it this way, I've always done things my own way. I figured it's easier to ask forgiveness than permission. My parents were very supportive of any one of us when we wanted to go on and study. [ibid.]**

W/O2 Thor Lerohl, R.C Air Cadets.

[The picture was taken just after he received his Pilot's Wings in the summer of 1953.]

Thor began teacher training at the University of Alberta in September 1954. He recalls that he was "a lazy studier but did enjoy learning". I asked him if he had any particular memories about his teachers in the Junior E program:

> **I remember being challenged by Erickson in Phys Ed, who later became a friend after I moved to Edmonton. Dr. Lord was our English teacher and he had a wicked sense of humour. Overall, I recall a feeling of tremendous support from my professors. They really set examples for me. [Interview 2]**

In general, Thor's memories of his initial teacher training are positive. He found the program to be very practically oriented and highly relevant; clearly designed to prepare them for a specific type of teaching situation.

> **It was really a "how to" program. How to teach the various courses. How to do the register, how to read a curriculum guide, operate equipment, to plan, and so on. Just very useful things. The real basics in terms of classroom operation. Keep within the children's vision. Never stand with your back to the windows because children can't see you... stuff like that. [Ibid.]**

In 1955, Thor returned to The County of Wetaskiwin to fulfill his commitment to the district in terms of the bursary. His early teaching experiences at Rosebriar School will be discussed in Chapter Six.

Commentary

As was the case with Alice, parental values in regards to the importance of education were influential in Thor's decision to become a teacher. In fact, all three of the Lerohl boys chose education as a profession. The middle brother, three years younger than Thor, is a professor at the University of Alberta in the Department of Rural Economy, and the youngest brother Bert, teaches Grade 4 in Wetaskiwin.

During our second interview, Thor mentioned that his family had boarded a young teacher while he was attending Sparling school. I asked Thor if this was a possible connection to his decision to choose teaching as a profession. He indicated that watching the teacher/boarder mark papers at night might have aroused his interest in teaching but basically, he felt that "Junior E was an opportunity to get further education, to continue to study." Thor then added that "there was the economy of the thing" to be considered as well. Although Thor characterizes himself as an individual who "makes up his mind on the spot", I suspect that in many of the important decisions action was taken only after a number of key factors had been considered.

Another interesting parallel between Alice and Thor is the impact of their early school experiences with corporal punishment on the coping strategies they would adopt in their own classrooms when management was a concern. Both viewed the use of the strap as excessive and incompatible with a "positive classroom environment," and resolved never to use this form of discipline as teachers. This decision is consistent with the findings of Munro (1987) and Britzman (1986) in that many of the behaviours of student and beginning teachers can be traced to their own experiences as learners in the classroom, especially if these experiences were traumatic.

Thor's early history reveals a trend that would continue throughout his teaching and administrative career; i.e., seeking out mentors to assist him in his growth and development within the profession. Thor's narrative indicates he learned that higher education was to be valued from his parents, that teaching can be fun from observing May, and that caring for students is important from Roy's gentle example. It is also quite evident that his early home and school experiences provided him with a great deal of self-confidence in both teaching and administration (Sikes et al., 1985).

> **You have to feel confident about the decisions you make in this profession. If you need somebody's permission every time you make a step, then I think you'd have trouble taking on leadership roles in any area, and particularly in education. To a great extent the job is that of melding a fascinating variety of humanity together to do one major job with a group of children. Unless you have a goal in terms of what you want to see it look like, I think it could be a rather daunting task. [Interview # 3, 1998 07 02]**

5.3 Mary Wasylyk: People Person

> **In the year 1932, I, Mary Wasylyk, was born to John and Celia Olinyk, a striving young farm family. I remember my early childhood as being very secure. Pleasant childhood experiences have been pressed in my memory as I recall walking through sunny glens and playing with farm pets — ducklings that swam in the meadow's warm summer pond and the dog that slept under the unpainted wooden-framed farm house.**

> **An important event took place at age four. My older brother, John, and I were transported with our family some forty miles away to a new life in Thorhild, Alberta, where my adventuresome parents exercised their entrepreneurial skills in managing their own small general store. Because our log house was located just behind the store, we children were thrust into a thriving economic social scene in which customers and/or friends continually interacted. As I observed my parents I learned their social skills and developed the desire to be a "people person" just like they were.**

These are the opening paragraphs from *My Life Story,* written by Mary as part of her contribution to our research collaboration on her life history. Mary wrote a number of stories about her teaching experiences, and I will be incorporating more of her writing into the next two chapters. However, I found the words quoted above to be particularly significant as they capture several of the personality traits which I believe made her successful as a teacher.

The information Mary shared with me during our interviews is very consistent with her stories, particularly in terms of the influence her parents had on her approach to children and teaching. Here are Mary's comments about her mother and father from the first of our three interviews.

> **My mother was a very big influence on me. She was a happy individual, a neighbourly woman who loved to give. When she baked doughnuts, the whole neighborhood enjoyed doughnuts and there was always someone over at our house for coffee. I enjoy people, and I think I got that from her. My father, on the other hand, was a businessman. I really coveted his presence, but it didn't happen as much as I wanted. There are only a few instances that I really recall in a fond way, and that was when I rode with him on business trips. After the grocery store he became an implement dealer, and he went from farm to farm, and sometimes he would take me with him in his truck and we'd visit all the farm people. [Interview # 1, 1997 07 16]**

Mary indicates that she "thrived" on the communal environment of their store at Thorhild, and in response to a question about how she decided on teaching as a profession, she offered the following response.

> **I guess it began when I was quite young, and in our home. It was like grand central station, I mean, there were always customers, friends and relatives coming in. I learned at a young age to enjoy and interact with people, and teaching allows you to do that as well. [ibid.]**

Over the course of the interviews, Mary identified several other influences on her decision to become a teacher, including her early relationship with her sister and her own success in school.

> **I had a sister six years younger to whom I could administer a lot of care. I enjoyed teaching her things that I had learned and sharing new ideas with her. I was an eager student myself. I really delighted in accomplishment, and it gave me good self-esteem to do that even though I was accepted for who I was. When I finished high school I wondered what profession to go into, and the two that I considered were nursing and teaching. In retrospect, I chose the right profession.**

When asked about her own early school experiences, Mary had mixed feelings:

> **Mary: There were good memories and bad memories because in those days some of the teachers weren't very well qualified and they did some things that would not make you feel good about yourself if you couldn't perform. And even if it happened to a friend, it left a memory that wasn't very good.**
>
> **Ed: Could you give me a specific example, Mary?**
>
> **Mary: Well, something that sticks in my mind is an incident in Grade 4 with a classmate who couldn't learn to tell time. The teacher got so upset, and told her how dumb she was. Later in that year, when I couldn't understand something, he said, 'You're just as dumb as she is, so go sit with her.' That's the kind of negativism that I experienced. That incident had great impact on me. [ibid.]**

Mary attended high school in Thorhild as well, and recalls her secondary school years as being "useful and positive." She mentions a Home Economics teacher whom she later used as a model. This teacher taught her how to take pride in the beauty of an "end product", and how to set parameters for herself and still have freedom within those parameters. [ibid.]. I then asked her if she could see any characteristics of her other teachers in herself.

> **Yes, I can. I remember the gentleness of my Grade One teacher when she read to us, and whenever I read my children nursery rhyme stories, I would think about her and how I felt in her class when she shared them with us. I would say that I learned from both my good and my poor teachers. [ibid.]**

After completing her Grade 12 in 1950, Mary entered the Junior E program at the University of Alberta. The availability of a bursary helped her in her choice between nursing and teaching, as money was in short supply. Again, Mary's mother had a role to play in her decision to teach.

> **Our mother really promoted higher education; that was very important to her, and she said that she would do anything to facilitate our getting educated at a higher level. And so, I stayed at our aunt's place, which was clear across the city, and had to travel an hour on a streetcar to get to the university. My mother wanted education for her daughters as well as her son, and so my sister and I felt very encouraged. [Interview # 1]**

Mary enjoyed her year at university, but she was anxious to start teaching her own class. In 195l, she received her first position, teaching Grades 1 to 6 in a two room school near Waugh, Alberta called Halfmoon Lake. I asked her whether she thought the Junior E program had adequately prepared her for this first classroom experience:

> **Probably what helped me the most was the Corbett Hall demonstration school and the different schools we went to for our student teaching. There I could actually go in and view what was happening and take some of the things that we learned in the classes and say, 'So this is what they mean!" [Interview # 2 1997 12 15]**

Mary provided me with one very interesting example of how useful and practical the Junior E Program could be for a first year teacher in a rural setting. This was the advice given to the young female teachers-to-be on how to handle the unwelcome advances of local bachelor farmers.

> **It was the typical schoolmarm story where the local farmer wanted to marry the teacher. This fellow gave me all kinds of information. He had $50,000, and I'd be well off, and all that, but we were well trained at the university in that they told us this would happen. They advised us to take care of our emotional needs, and not fall into a trap. They sat us down on the Phys. Ed floor and said these are the kinds of things you can expect. It was almost like a 'teacher beware' talk - a heart to heart talk to the girls in Phys. Ed at the time. I was thankful for that, even though I had no problem. I already had my high school sweetheart. I still do. [ibid.]**

Commentary

As I learned more of Mary's life history, it became clear that her early years as a child in Thorhild, surrounded by a loving family and friendly, supportive community had played an important role in shaping her educational philosophy. The story of Mary's teaching career provided example after example of her attempts to establish this same kind of community in her classrooms. This is especially true of the years she spent teaching kindergarten.

> **Kindergarten was just a beehive of activity with purposeful learning. You could see the learning process happening. That thrilled me, excited me because the children could learn at their own level, and they would go as far as they could in their skill development. I think there's a lot of strength in community. In my Kindergarten there were 20 to 25 activity centres operating, and it created a beautiful buzz of activity. With parents involved, teaching didn't seem as lonely with people coming in and out. My door was always open. No one had to knock on my door. [Interview # 3, 1998 07 06]**

As noted in both Thor and Alice's stories, Mary identified both positive and negative role models in her own teachers, and she used her experiences with these individuals to develop her own approach to working with children.

> **I felt I never wanted the bad experiences I had in school to happen to my children, or to any child, and so, in my teaching, I learned all I could about how to encourage students, and to say how well they were doing, rather than dwelling on the negative. [Interview # 1]**

Much of the current research in teacher education suggests that a philosophy of teaching is something that evolves over the course of your career. (Alexander et al., 1992; Britzman, 1991; Calderhead, 1990.) Mary, however, feels that our innate personalities play a large role in determining both our educational philosophy and the kind of teacher we become.

> **I think that as far as administration and philosophies go, it's just like you have your own bent anyway, your own innateness, and you know the way you're going to relate to children.... What you're like as a person will very much dictate how you will relate to others, like enjoying each other, and being honourable about accepting others even though you disagree. You can disagree honourably. You need to focus in on how the other person is operating, and feeling, and that relates to children very much. [Interview 2]**

In her 1996 study of three retired New Zealand teachers, Middleton suggests that the process of developing a theory of education begins with our early experiences at home and school and continues even into retirement where it is influenced by our "mature perspectives" [p. 553].

> **This suggests that if an educational theory (such as progressivism) is to "take" with a particular teacher, it must make sense of his or her own experience (as a student and/or as a teacher) and must create a sense of possibility for the kinds of educating which s/he sees as desirable. [p. 558]**

It is clear that Mary's commitment to creating a communal, supportive environment for children is rooted in her own positive childhood experiences; it 'made sense' to her as a guiding philosophy for her entire career in the classroom.

5.4 Pauline Hahn: Great Expectations

Pauline Hahn, née Makar, was born on July 12, 1928 in Prosperity, a small farming community near the town of Grassland northeast of Edmonton. Pauline was the middle of seven children in a farming family and attended school from grades one to ten in a one-room schoolhouse called Hammond. During that time, she had only three teachers - all very different in their approaches to teaching.

> **The first teacher I had was from grades 1 to 5, and ran a classroom in a very different fashion to what I did in later years. I got the math book, and when I was finished with the math book, she gave me the next math book. The next person taught me from grades 6 to 9, but she had a very different style of teaching. We still followed the textbook, but we worked with the teacher rather than on our own. She was a very encouraging person. In Grade 10, there was a gentleman that came in, and he was a rather harsh person. He was friendly and outgoing with the kids out of the classroom, but he was very, very rigid and sometimes I feel that I have emulated him more than any of the others, but not because I admired him. I don't know why. [Pauline, Interview # 2, 1997 12 06]**

Pauline was actually the first student in her community to complete Grade 9 and continue on in to high school.

> **I remember the day I walked to the post office because I knew the Grade 9 departmental results were going to be out, and we had 2-1/2 miles to walk to the post office. We started off to the post office and this horrible storm came up. It thundered, and lightninged [sic], but I walked through this rain, and I got this envelope, and it said 'Honours standing'! And it was like sunshine all the way home, and I was soaking wet. It was wonderful! [Interview # 1, 1997 07 28]**

Up to this point in the interview, Pauline had shared very little about her home life, so I asked her what her parent's reaction had been to the examination results.

> **They said, well, they expected that. That's the thing that deflated me. Like, well, of course you passed! Why wouldn't you? No, they were very matter of fact about it. My mother was very much like that. It was like, if you did something, well, that's what you were supposed to do. Actually, I figured they would be excited, but I wasn't disappointed that they weren't. I knew I had their approval. [ibid.]**

Pauline completed her high school at St. Mary's in Edmonton, and remembers regarding the sisters who taught her with a mixture of fear and admiration.

> **I remember two in particular. One was a very stern person. She taught social studies, and she walked up and down the classroom, and if you were slouching over, you got a pen jab in your back. But I think she was an excellent teacher. She certainly knew her material. I don't think that she necessarily motivated me to the same extent that one of the other sisters did. [For example] Sister Augustine was one of those people that you really felt obligated to learn the material from. It was just her manner. She expected it, and you knew what she expected, and you felt you wanted to live up to her expectations. [Interview # 2]**

After completing high school, Pauline decided to enter teaching. I asked her about making that decision.

> **Oh, I can tell you exactly how that came about because I have thought about it so many times. As a child, we grew up in a very rural situation, and as a child I loved to read. I mean, if I had things to do, and I picked up a book, things didn't get done. But I remember this one day I was sitting reading, and my dad and a friend of his came into the house, and this fellow said to my dad, 'What's the matter with that daughter of yours? She's always got her nose in a book.' Then my dad said, 'She's going to be a teacher someday.' And I don't know why that stuck with me, but I remember that so well because it just seemed like after that, there was no other thing that I wanted to do... I guess maybe I was living up to his expectations, and I've wondered about that since. Like, it was, this is what my dad expects, for me to be teaching. I looked up to my teachers as a child, and I guess I felt a teacher was somebody special. [ibid.]**

As I mentioned in Chapter Four, Pauline was one of the teacher trainees in the Wartime Emergency Teacher Training Program. She remembers the program as being "a little bit of everything and far too short".

> **There was a Language Arts course and I can remember a lot of people questioning the value of what they considered to be kindergarten kinds of activities. I don't remember too much about that course...One of the activities that we had to do was to collect games and activities, and put them on cards. We had to categorize them as to what age group they would be suitable for, and the materials that we would need and, so that would be a methods kind of thing. [ibid.]**

In the Wartime Emergency Program, the opportunities for both classroom observation and practice teaching were scaled back in order to place the new teachers in classrooms as soon as possible. Pauline felt she learned very little from these field experiences because all of their placements were in the city.

> **You know, when we practice taught, we went into Grade 4, we went into Grade 6, we went into whatever. Then I went out to a rural situation. I had all of the grades. That's a totally different ball game. Actually, when I think about it, my own schooling was practice teaching in a sense. I'd been in a rural school, and so I naturally modeled it more or less after the way I'd seen it done before, because that's what I had to go by. There wasn't enough practice teaching to fully prepare me for rural teaching. [ibid.]**

Pauline completed the abbreviated teacher training program in the spring of1946, and shortly after, accepted a position with the Athabasca School Division. She remembers quite vividly the day the telegram from the superintendent arrived:

> **It said 'If you are ready to take a classroom, and we've got all kinds of classrooms for you, please phone me and let me know." So, I phoned the superintendent, and we made arrangements to meet in Athabasca. He would take me out to my school. Well, talk about walking on air! I virtually flew home. I don't think my feet touched the ground. I was so excited because I had a school. I can still remember the bubbly feeling that I had. (Interview # 1]**

The "bubbly feeling" was soon replaced by trepidation as she realized the responsibilities that confronted her in her first year of teaching. At this point, Pauline was still uncertain about choosing teaching as a vocation; yet everyone *expected* her to do the job.

> **I was frightened when I went out there. I had, what, eight months of training, and a bit of practice teaching. I went out into an isolated rural school. I think the nearest other teacher was probably 5 miles away. I had nobody. There was no phone. I had nobody to turn to, and I had questions. [Interview # 1]**

Pauline was to begin her teaching career at Gamefield, a one-room school less than thirty miles from the one in which she had been taught. The circle was complete.

Commentary

I have subtitled Pauline's early biography "Great Expectations" for several reasons. A NUDIST text search revealed Pauline used the word "expectation" seventeen times during our interviews – more than all the other research participants combined. As the previous quotations from my interviews with Pauline indicate, she was influenced not only by the expectations that her parents and her teachers had of her in terms of academic achievement, but also by the expectations that she had of herself. In the Dickensian sense of this word, she felt the future *prospects* of both her and her students depended, as she states, "on setting the bar higher". Pauline returned to a discussion of expectations several times during our time together, particularly in the final interview when I asked her to reflect back on her career. Here are two examples:

#1 Pauline: I really felt that one should have high expectations of children. It bothered me to hear people say, these kids can't do this, so we just don't challenge them with it. I felt there needed to be a challenge. I used to tell my kids things like, the higher you aim, the closer you're going to get to what you're after.

Ed: Should teachers put limits on children in the classroom?

Pauline: When you're teaching thirty kids in the classroom, there are going to be many that won't measure up to the expectations that you set for them, but I think if you lower your expectations there are going to be even fewer who reach their potential. That has always been my philosophy, to some degree. [Interview # 3]

#2 Ed: What would you do differently if you were starting over?

Pauline: I'd use a lot more positive reinforcement, I know that. Very definitely. I don't think I would lower my expectations. I still feel that there are standards to be maintained, and I always felt, and I still think that the more you expect of kids, the more you're going to get. The more you expect of anybody, even yourself. [Ibid.]

With this teacher, we see the confluence of home and school influences in her decision to become a teacher. Although other considerations (lack of choice, limited finances, escape from farm life) discussed previously were present in Pauline's story, her principal reason for choosing teaching as a profession appears to be predicated on not disappointing others.

> **I really don't know why I went into teaching. I've talked about my parents, especially my mother, and I'm beginning to think that at some point everybody assumes that this is what you're going to do, and so you want to do it. When it came to a choice of doing something that I thought my mother wouldn't approve of, I automatically felt I had to do it the right way, and I think Sister Augustine, in some respect, had the same effect on me. The same with my Dad. I don't remember thinking that I have to do what my father expects, but it was there somewhere. I don't know, Ed. I really don't know. [Interview # 2]**

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, many young men and women of Pauline's generation were looking for something more than a farming future. They had observed firsthand how hard their parents and their neighbours worked to eke out a living on the Alberta prairie, an existence exacerbated by the Great Depression. At the same time, World War II had opened the door to a number of career options, and one of the most 'acceptable' alternatives for young women was teaching. However, what makes the story of Pauline, different from her contemporaries is that she believed her parents expected her to be something other than a farm wife, and that expectation appears to have provided the necessary impetus for her to pursue a career in teaching.

Ready to Teach.□ Pauline at Gamefield School 1947

5.5 Peggy Melmock: Almost a Nurse

The story of Peggy's childhood and early schooling is quite a departure from those already described in this chapter. Peggy was born Peggy Craven on January 22, 1929 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. The family moved to the city of Edmonton in 1931 and Peggy completed both elementary and high school there, with the exception of one brief move to Clearwater, B.C. in Grade 4.

Peggy is a natural *raconteur.* She seldom needed prompting during the interviews and seemed to enjoy the retelling of her life story. She is therefore a good choice of subject for the purpose of giving the reader an idea of the interview process as it actually occurred. What follows is part of Peggy's story as related to me in our first interview.

> **E: Peggy, could we begin with some memories from your childhood?**
>
> **PM: Well, I was the eldest of two. My brother was six years younger. We were actually very poor. I was born during the depression. My dad had a terrible time, but he would not go on relief, so he worked at everything. Anyway, we moved, and we moved. I lived in the west end in about four different places, and I lived on the south side in five or six different places. But I certainly came from a very loving, wonderful family, and I didn't realize as a child that I was poor because my mother never complained.**
>
> **Ed: What were you like as a child?**
>
> **PM: I think sometimes I wasn't as attentive, or as mature as I should have been about things. For many years my mother ran her own nursing home, and she worked very, very hard. There was so much activity. You always felt you were kind of in the way because everybody was so busy. But it was a different kind of a life. For a long time we lived in the basement, which was a converted coal bin. It was pretty bad. You feel like such a gopher, living in the basement. Later on, my mother sold the nursing home and all the old people left, and I ended up living upstairs in my wonderful little room, which I thought was magnificent. That was when I was 15.**
>
> **Ed: Do you have any particular memories from elementary school?**
>
> **Peggy: Well, I remember my Grade 1 teacher slapped me when I didn't start printing at the right time. I forgave her for that, but she was let go that year. We were all a little frightened of her, and I remember the school floor was sloped, and not all of the kids were fully toilet trained. I can recall sitting in school watching these little rivulets run past me...I had a much nicer year in Grade 2, and in Grade 3, I remember a boy named Ray ____. He was a big quiet kid, kind of withdrawn, and we always ignored him, really didn't have that much to do with him. Then came Valentines Day,**

and now we all felt guilty because maybe we hadn't treated him properly. So on Valentine's Day we all gave him a Valentine. He ended up getting more Valentines than anybody, and I felt so good about that.

Ed: Why do you think that story sticks with you, Peggy?

Peggy: Well, because when you're in school, certain people are mean to you. For example, I was a bit bow-legged and kids used to call me Peg-leg Pete or something like that. In Grade 5, I remember some of the girls who were the 'in' group pretended to like me, and then after 3 or 4 weeks they said, 'Oh, no, we didn't really like you.' So I always tried to be kind to people. I think the reason I remember that story is that in all the years of my being in school, as a student or teacher, I don't think I was ever deliberately mean to anyone. I hated it when children picked on somebody. I found that so difficult to take. If students were impolite to me, I could accept that to a certain extent, but I could not accept the fact that they were mean to other children.

I don't want to create the impression that I had an unhappy childhood, Ed, quite the contrary; but there were good times and bad times. I'll tell you someone who influenced me in a good way was a girl friend. We were in Grade 5 together, and we were very, very close, and to me, the world rose and set on Myrt's shoulders. And I said to her one day, as she was quite a reader, 'Do you like reading?' And she said, 'What I really like, Peggy, is words, and the meaning of words.' So, after that I was always interested in words, just because I felt she was such a good student, and a good friend, so Myrt was the one that got me interested in that angle of my education.

Peggy Craven, Age 16 - 1944

Ed: Was high school a positive experience for you?

Peggy: Oh, it had its ups and downs, like most kids I guess. I will share one story with you. I think I was in Grade 12, and this teacher, every time I'd miss a few days of school for a speed skating meet, he would take me to task. He would just bawl me out in front of all the other students. So, one day I thought, I'll get you. So, I sat at the back of the room, and when he bawled me out, I just sat there and I wept. I didn't cry out loud. I just wept. I didn't know what else to do. I was not the kind of person that would be rude to someone. I sat there

> **and I took it quite a few times, but then finally I thought, 'I'll get you back with the only weapon I know.' So I sat there with the tears streaming down. He never bothered me again. [Peggy 1997 07 31]**

After a year taking business education courses, Peggy decided to become a nurse. This decision was influenced both by her experiences growing up in the nursing home and her mother's determination that Peggy would have a better life than her own.

> **Mother died at 46 of cancer, and it was quite sad, for she had always been my chief supporter. She did a quiet brainwash on me. She would always say, 'Now if I had an education, I wouldn't have to work so hard.' So, I remember I got into Grade 11, and I thought, 'Oh, I don't like school! Oh, but what am I going to do?' I mean, I can't do anything. But I can remember thinking mother would cry if I didn't continue on with my education. My mother used to want me to study so badly that she would carry the dinner tray upstairs to my room, so that I didn't have to come downstairs to eat, and take time out from my studying. And she would sit in my room and ask me questions, and she was such a wonderful support.**
>
> **Anyway, I had decided to go into nursing, but I was an absolute failure as a nurse. I mean, I can't tell you how many awful things happened. I was very tomboyish, and I had a harsh, loud laugh and a few other things, and so I didn't make it. I was doing all right academically, but my whole personality did not suit nursing. I got out of nursing and became a telephone operator, but I realized that wasn't my niche either. Then the government came out with this deal whereby they would pay your first two years free if you went into teaching. I was the first one on both sides of the family to ever go to university. Nobody, but nobody ever went to university. But I did. Well, if you don't think my mother was proud!**
>
> **Ed: Did you enter the Junior E Program with friends?**
>
> **Peggy: No. I went all by myself. There wasn't even a single person I knew that was going into teaching.**
>
> **Ed: Did you consider marriage at all at this point?**

"Almost a nurse" 1949

> **Peggy: Oh, no! As a matter of fact, I went out with a fellow for four years who wanted to get married, and I said, 'Gee, I'm sorry, I want to travel, I want to go out with other guys, and I want to get an education.' I suppose it was mother's influence, and perhaps my own determination, my own ambition. I was going to get an education; I was going to be somebody before I ever got married. Mother always said marriage was a very difficult chore. She made me realize that marriage was not a bed of roses, that it wasn't like playing house. And I was quite immature. I remember a very good friend of mine coming to me when he was 18, and he says, 'Peggy, I'm getting married. Why don't you?' I said, 'What? Me? Heavens, I can't even take care of myself, how could I ever take care of anyone else?' [ibid.]**

At this point, our conversation veered off as Peggy shared some of her later experiences in the classroom, several of which I will share with the reader in Chapter Six. I then asked Peggy to talk about her initial teacher training experiences.

> **Ed: Tell me what you remember about the Junior E Program.**
>
> **Peggy: Well, I remember my time in the Education Building. They had two or three classrooms that they called demonstration classes, and they were sort of like regular classrooms. They were downstairs, and we were upstairs, and the teachers would come up to give demonstration lessons. Sometimes, we'd go downstairs to do something with the children.**
>
> **Ed; Do any of your teachers stand out in your memory?**
>
> **Peggy: Yes. I remember Stan Clark. He was in sociology, and he had a real sense of humour. He was very good at advising you about different things that might happen in the classroom. You know, of all the books I read and everything, the one phrase I remember, Ed, was: 'Nip trouble in the bud.' They told us get to the trouble when it's small, you know, and deal with it.**
>
> **Ed: Did you go out on practicum?**
>
> **Peggy: Yes. I was sent out to Cloverbar, for a couple of weeks the first time, and then we were out for about four weeks the second time. We went to the same school each time, and the second time we had to teach a whole unit. It was very different for me because it was a rural school, very different to what I was used to. But the teacher was very good, and very helpful. It's a funny thing, but the girl that I was partnered with had actually done some teaching, as a correspondence supervisor before she entered the program. Anyway, she really locked horns with our sponsor teacher because she didn't believe in some of the stuff that the teacher was doing; whereas I, having no experience, got along fine with her. I really couldn't find anything wrong with her because I had nothing to base it on.**
>
> **Ed: You mentioned earlier that you stayed at university for a second year.**

Peggy: Second year was much different than the first, and I didn't enjoy it nearly as much. One thing that they made us do, which I just thought was just awful, was we'd be taking English, or something like that, and then in the afternoon we'd have to take a bus and go across town to visit a particular class. You'd shake hands with the teacher, and she'd say, 'This is my class, and in an hour you would be teaching them something.' Well, if you don't think that was hard! Oh! It was criminal! You weren't familiar with the school, the teacher, or the kids. You just plunged in cold turkey. Many times the teacher would have certain expectations about this particular lesson and maybe the way that you portrayed it wasn't the way that he did it. So, at the end he'd say, 'Well, you didn't really get the notion across.' But, Ed, you didn't even know what he was teaching because you didn't spend any real time with them, you were just there on that particular day. I had had such good marks in my first year of teaching, but I did poorly in my second year because I just never felt that sense of continuity.

E: When did you know that it was the right decision to become a teacher??

PM: Well, I think when I finally went to university, and saw what was there, then I really wanted to be a teacher. Just the whole idea of learning and maybe passing learning on and being an influence in a child's life. I never could have been a person who worked in an office. I needed a job working with people, and of course, nursing was dealing with people, and so I think that perhaps teaching was just sort of a natural second choice. [ibid.]

Commentary

The purpose in presenting a unified segment of Peggy's life history at this juncture was to allow the reader an opportunity to gain a sense of the actual interview process. Mishler (1986) believes that one of the strengths of the narrative interview as a research tool is its ability to represent an entire course of action, with beginning, middle and end. It is a regrettable but necessary process for the researcher to select only those events which he feels are relevant to the research question, but the original flavour of the story is lost in doing so. As a life history researcher, I felt it was important for the reader to experience the life as it was lived and recounted by the 'author' in its unadulterated form. Peggy's narrative of her journey through childhood and adolescence provides us with a coherent view of how a number of events were instrumental in her eventual decision to become a teacher, and how some of these same incidents contributed to the formation of her personal pedagogical style.

Peggy's story shares most of the key influences previously identified in the stories of Alice, Mary, Thor and Pauline. In all of these early life histories one can see how parents, friends, family and teachers combine to induce the young student towards a life in the classroom. However, it is the unique interaction between these life variables that makes each story both interesting and informative. In Peggy's case, it is the significant role her mother played in determining not only her vocation but also her outlook on life (Steedman, 1986).

Presentation of the unbroken narrative also provides an opportunity for the reader to directly observe the problem alluded to in Chapter One when participating in collaborative autobiographical research (Butt et al., 1992). As Paget (1983) has indicated, there is always a concern for the interviewer that similarities between their own life experiences and those of the interviewee will influence the questions that are asked and the direction that the interview takes. In other words; a good story which includes a common life experience is highly conducive to story "swapping."

Of all the life stories related to this point, Peggy's seems to me to be the most paradoxical. As Novak (1978) has pointed out, humans are dramatic animals. The richer a life, the more subplots it contains. "Interesting people," he muses, "are full of contradictions" [p. 49]. Despite watching her mother virtually work herself to death in a nursing home, Peggy's first choice of a profession was to become a nurse. Similarly, even though she never regarded herself as a good student or true scholar, she excelled at university. Although in her narrative she characterized her childhood as a happy one, the 'characters' in the stories Peggy chose to share with me include an unemployed father, dark basements, cruel classmates, and intimidating teachers. However, as Max van Manen (1991) has argued, tensions and contradictions belong to the pedagogical experience. "This antinomic structure of experience is probably the foremost factor that prompts us to continually reflect on questions of how we should act with children and students" [p.61].

5.6 Glenn Munro: Little Class on the Prairie

As McIntyre (1981) has suggested, the story of one's life is always embedded in the stories of those communities from which we derive our identity [p. 221]. This was readily observable in Mary's narrative and is especially true in the early life history of Glenn Munro. Glenn grew up on a twelve-section ranch Southeast of Drumheller, Alberta. He was the 11th of 12 children with a spread of 29 years between the eldest and the youngest.

> **I was already an uncle when I was born. My older brothers and sisters were all away and married when my younger brother and I arrived, so it was like having three families. The older ones I didn't know actually, until I was a teenager. I had met some of them, but they never came home. [Glenn Munro, Interview #1, 1998 04 14]**

Although most of Glenn's brothers and sisters were interested in ranching, Glenn had decided at an early age that this was not the future for him.

> **I didn't want anything to do with the ranch except ride the horses, and herd the cattle. I wasn't interested in anything else, so I helped mom in the house and with the garden in the summertime and I helped my Dad plant trees. While I was working, I would be thinking about what I wanted to be, and all I ever wanted to be was a teacher. [Ibid.]**

Glenn's mother was instrumental in helping Glenn to achieve his wish at an early age. She felt everyone should receive an education and encouraged Glenn in all his studies. During the winter, when gardening and other chores were less demanding, Glenn would spend his Saturdays reading or drawing in the kitchen. One day when he was about eight, his mother suggested he help his younger brother, Howard, with his schoolwork. Howard had just entered Grade One and was struggling with his Spelling. Not long after, one of Glenn's older brothers moved across the road from the ranch and Howard was joined by his nephew and niece, Jimmy and Gladys; Glenn was now the teacher in a three student "Saturday School".

> **Glenn: It was really meant to be a fun school, although some times we worked on things they were learning at our real school. I had a little blackboard and chalk and pencils and lots of paper. I wouldn't keep more than an hour, usually less, so that they didn't get bored or anything. We did a lot of artwork on paper that was like newsprint. We always had crayons, and were very careful with our pencils because Dad might not go to town for two weeks at a stretch.**

> **Ed: How long did the Saturday school last?**
>
> **Glenn: Actually, it continued for about four years, until my older brother moved away to Calgary. By that time I was in Grade 8 and Jimmy and Howard were in Grade 6. Gladys would be in Grade 4. Howard was now doing well in school and I was pretty busy so it was a good time to end it.**
>
> **Ed: Have any of your 'students' ever mentioned the Saturday school when your family gets together?**
>
> **Glenn: Oh, yes! Jimmy always claims that the only reason he learned to spell was because I taught him. [ibid.]**

Glenn received all of his education from Grades 1 to 9 in a one room rural school located about five kilometers from the family ranch. The school had the rather picturesque name of Square Deal, and usually enrolled twelve to fifteen students. Glenn reports that he got along well with his teachers – mostly young women out of Calgary Normal - who lived in the teacherage next to the school.

> **Many of them came out from the city, and I think now of the hardships they went through, the lonely winter nights, sitting there in the cold, working with gas lanterns for light. They never stayed too long, but they did a good job while they were there. I think each one of them pushed us as far as we could go, and each of them had a special way of making us feel good. [ibid.]**

Glenn enjoyed school, and felt that he had learned a great deal about teaching from these young women. One lesson that was to remain with him for his entire career came as a result of a contest of wills with a teacher over creativity in art.

> **Glenn: I had this one teacher in Grade 2 who really encouraged me in Art, but she had very definite ideas as to how it was to be done. I'm not a great drawer as such, but I like to paint, and do my own thing, and some of it is fairly abstract. This teacher insisted that I draw trees that looked like trees, and flowers that had five petals, and pink in the centre. Well, I didn't always want my flowers to look that way. I guess she figured I was stubborn, but I really wanted to do it my way. I can remember trying to push my will a little bit. I wanted to do a few things my way because we were so free on the ranch. When your chores were done, you could go, so I didn't want this confined stuff all the time. I wanted the freedom to express myself. [ibid.]**

Glenn also had problems with the weekly spelling and math bees at Square Deal School. He had great difficulty spelling and calculating in his head, but was fine if he could write it down. As a result, he was usually first to return to his seat during these classroom competitions

> **I hated those spelling bees and especially the math ones on Fridays. I never had them in my own classroom. I also didn't like the way they picked teams for sports. Somebody always has to be picked last. I can remember when we played baseball on Sundays and they always picked teams that way and I always objected. My older brother would say, 'Come on, Glenn, follow the crowd.' But I'd say 'I don't want to follow the crowd.'**
>
> **But I always played, and I was a pretty good player, because I didn't want to spoil it for others. I could have sulked and gone away, but that wasn't my way. I always tried for change, but if I couldn't get change I waited. And I did that all through life. I will always try. I won't give up. I will try to make a little change, and a little change is better than no change. That's what I did, and I kept changing. So, when I started teaching I came up with all sorts of ways to divide into teams without anyone having to feel bad about it, and that's long before I took any university courses in psychology. [Ibid.]**

Glenn took part of his Grade 10 at Square Deal and boarded in Hanna for the rest of 10 and Grade 11. He then left school to work at several jobs, including a stint as a Hudson's Bay factor in Fort Vermilion. On his return to Hanna, he met Connie, his future wife, at her graduation dance and subsequently went to work at her father's pharmacy. The plan was for Glenn to complete his apprenticeship at the drug store in Hanna and then enter

Glenn Munro: "Spitfires" 1944-45

first year pharmacy. Glenn was actually registered at the University of Alberta in this faculty when he ran into a friend who had just entered teaching.

> **Rob had just completed his Junior E and was teaching outside of Hanna and he said, 'Glenn, why would you go into pharmacy? Teaching is what you always wanted to do. Besides, you can't afford four years of university; you're married. Go to the Berry Creek School Board and they will give you a bursary.' And so I said okay and I changed, and I was accepted and never regretted it. I'm so glad I didn't become a pharmacist.**
>
> **E: So, one day you're in a pharmacy and the next day you've decided to be part of the Junior E class. What did your wife say?**
>
> **GM: Well, actually we never discussed it. I just thought, well, that's the way to do it then. [Ibid.]**

As Glenn had already enrolled at the University of Alberta in Pharmacy, he decided to continue there in the Junior E program. Glenn thoroughly enjoyed his teacher training, finding it both useful and relevant.

> **Glenn: We had eleven courses – all method courses - in the program. For example, how do you teach math? They used the textbooks that we would find in the classroom, so when we went out to teach we already knew them. Each subject was taught the same way. Here are the books you're going to use. Let's go through them. We also made collections of ideas for art, and songs for music and games for P.E. It was a very practical program.**
>
> **Ed: Were any of your professors particularly memorable?**
>
> **Glenn: Oh, Yes. I still remember Dr. MacGregor teaching us to use nature as part of your curriculum. He made us go around the old education building, identifying all kinds of plants, roses and tulips in the spring, and certain bushes and trees in the fall. He made us learn them all, and he said, 'When you go out to your school, you'll be able to point these out to your students. It's important because it's part of their daily environment.' I also learned the pleasure of gardening from him and still do it today.**
>
> **Ed: So, you don't recall a lot of theory in the Junior E?**
>
> **GM: No. No. There was no room for theory in that first year. The theory came later when I started taking specific social studies, history and arts courses and stuff like that. That's where you got the theory. [Ibid.]**

When his program ended at Easter, Glenn returned to Berry Creek to honour his commitment to the district.

> **I met with the superintendent and said 'What kind of a school have you got for me?' He said, 'We have no schools at all. You better look elsewhere.**

Have you anything in mind?' I said, 'Yes, I'd like to start in Edmonton if I'm not needed here. So, I went to Edmonton Public and they hired me. [Ibid.]

Glenn was assigned to a Grade 3 class at Mill Creek School and remained with the Edmonton Public School District until his retirement in 1991 - after 35 years of elementary teaching.

Commentary

It could be argued that Glenn's 'career' as a teacher began not at Mill Creek Elementary but on the family ranch in Carolside, Alberta. Marion Perry, the British Primary Educator, once remarked that "play is the work of children". Most of us can recall 'playing school' at some time during our childhood; however, it is my contention that the Saturday school was in many ways a 'real' school for Glenn and his three pupils. With his mother's encouragement, Glenn's weekend classroom not only increased his interest in learning and teaching, but helped him to develop pedagogical skills which he would use to assist the teachers at Square Deal and in his own classroom later in life. Saturday school also provided Glenn with an outlet – perhaps even an escape – from the demanding work of ranch life that his many brothers and sisters accepted as their future. His mother must have sensed in him a desire to learn that was not present in the other children, a belief that was substantiated by the fact that out of twelve children, only Glenn would go on to university.

It is also interesting to note that despite Glenn's claim during the interview that he "never wanted to be anything but a teacher", he might well have ended up as a pharmacist working for his father-in-law if it had not been for the timely intervention of a friend who had just entered the teaching profession. Like Thor, Glenn needed one final 'nudge' to put him into the Junior E program, and as was the case with Thor, Mary, Peggy and Pauline, the financial incentive of the provincial government bursary influenced his ultimate decision.

During his year in the Junior E program, Glenn continued to prepare for his chosen profession by observing carefully those already skilled in teaching and then trying it out for himself.

> **I think the methods approach taken in The Junior E really worked for me because I tried everything and if it didn't work I threw it out. Next time, I'd try it a different way. At University, I watched my professors and my practicum teachers and retained all their ideas and methods on how to approach each subject area. I did the same thing back home at Square Deal. I used to watch my own teachers teach, and then I'd try it out with the other children when I was asked to help. I've done that all my life. I love trying new things and learning from others, but I have to be sure that it works for me. [ibid.]**

Glenn also credits his teachers for giving him the values he believes are important to inculcate in your own teaching. He respected the teachers at Square Deal for their courage and devotion to the profession, and he admired and imitated the professors at the university like Dr. MacGregor who advocated a hands-on, practical approach to learning. Like Peggy, Thor and Mary, Glenn determined what not to do in the classroom from his teachers. There would be no spelling bees on Friday afternoons in Mr. Munro's class, and no child would suffer the humiliation of being chosen last for a sporting activity.

5.7 Gerry Grover: The Little Professor

Gerald Douglas Grover, Doug to his family and close friends, was born in Assiniboia, Saskatchewan on October 14, 1930 – almost a year to the day after the stock market crash on Wall Street, which signaled the beginning of the Great Depression. Shortly after Gerry's first birthday, his father, a mechanic by trade, packed up the family in their Model T and headed for Peace River, Alberta. After discovering, as Gerry describes it, "That the streets weren't paved with gold", Gerry and his family returned to Edmonton where he would remain for the rest of his career.

Gerry attended elementary school in Northeast Edmonton. During these years, he could not recall any particular teacher as being influential in his eventual decision to become a teacher. He recalls them as being "mostly positive" with one notable exception.

> **When we moved into the Highlands area, and I had to change school in May, I had a rough time at first. My new teacher was a real tough character.**

> **I was a shy little fellow coming in, and he wasn't very good with me. He set me down and questioned what I'd been doing at the other school. I remember he said, 'Didn't you learn anything? Now, don't come up with can that wrong again!' He took out a strap and he whammed it on the desk. And from that time on, I've never respected anybody that used the strap or talked about the strap. Of course, that's affected my whole 35 years. I didn't believe in the strap. I thought there were far better ways of getting discipline. [Interview # 1, 1997 11 14]**

Gerry appears to have made up his mind about becoming a teacher at an early age. Like Mary and Glenn, the impetus came from being involved with younger siblings:

The Little Professor with his sister Norma and "Mickey" 1942

> **Gerry: I think my real beginning of teaching and working with kids started when I looked after my four younger sisters. They laugh at it now, but we used to play school all the time, and I made them do their schoolwork. Soon I had all the neighbourhood kids playing school. I taught them from Grade 2, 3 up. I was involved with my sisters' education all through their schooling. I used to accompany my mother to home and school meetings and parent teacher interviews for my sisters. My dad and older brothers were mechanics, and neither parent had any educational background at all.**
>
> **Ed: Do you remember how you first got taken along for the school interviews with the younger siblings?**
>
> **Gerry: Well, it was mainly once they got up into Grade 6 and above, and I'd just tell mom she had to go and see the teacher. I could see my kid sister might be having problems, and so I said, 'Well, let's go.' That was especially true when they got into the junior high grades. I always went along. My sisters were up to eight years younger than me, and we went to the same school, with some of the same teachers and principal and I thought I should be involved. I just seemed to be the one to do it. I was going to be a teacher, and this was part of the experience. [ibid.]**

Gerry does not recall his parents as being very interested in higher education. They seemed quite willing to let him take a leadership role in this regard with the younger siblings, but never encouraged him to go on.

> **Gerry: You know, they used to call me 'professor' from the time I was a little kid. Even neighbourhood kids called me professor. Strange, I remember that now, but I haven't heard it for a long time. I liked school. School was my life. It's all I talked about. But I don't remember my parents ever pushing me. If they encouraged me at all, it was by putting me on a pedestal through the years. I was the one they came to for advice.**
>
> **Ed: What about your brothers and sisters?**
>
> **Gerry: None of the girls went through school beyond Grade 11 or 12. They mostly became secretaries, and my brothers were mechanics like my Dad, or went into sales. None of them went to university whatsoever. But it's what I wanted. [ibid.]**

However, Gerry does recall some encouragement and role modeling from his junior high and high school teachers.

> **My junior high school teachers got me into art and drama and that carried on right through into high school. I remember them well, and I have great memories from those years. There are probably some of them that I am influenced by, but I never sat down with any of them, really, and talked about being a teacher. By late junior high, they knew I was going to be a teacher because of the idea of the kids calling me professor, even though I wasn't that great of a student. [Ibid.]**

Graduation Day - 1953

Gerry was one of the few teachers in my study who did not opt for the "Junior E and Bursary" route into teaching. After enrolling in first year of the Standard S, he decided at Christmas to go right through university until he had his B.Ed. Gerry was able to accomplish this by working for the Highways Department in the spring and summer and living at home with his parents. Gerry thrived at university, although like Peggy, he found the B.Ed degree program less friendly.

> **I made some close friends in the first year because I was in the Standard S program, and with the same group, much like in high school. However, once you are in the degree program you're running down to the other end of the campus in a room full of strangers. But it was an interesting life, and I made some good friends that I've kept to this day. [Interview # 2, 1997 12 19]**

After completing his degree, Gerry was ready to teach at the high school level in Edmonton, but ran into a problem. Once again, we see a school superintendent taking an active role in the professional life of a beginning teacher.

> **They wouldn't give me high school in the city, they'd give me elementary, but I was determined to be a high school teacher. That is what I had trained for. I had a Bachelor of Ed. in Secondary English. Then I had an interview with Wally Worth, the superintendent of Cloverbar School Division, and he's the one that influenced me to go into elementary. He sat down with me, and we had a meeting before the school year began. He said he really needed an elementary teacher in Fort Saskatchewan, and he was very convincing. I don't know how he convinced me, but it was the best thing that could have happened. Once I met those children, and began working with them, I knew he was right. [Interview # 1]**

Commentary

The decision to relate Gerry Grover's life history immediately after Glenn Munro's' was deliberate on my part. Glenn and Gerry taught together at Avonmore School in Edmonton for ten years and became good friends personally and professionally. By coincidence, they even share the same birthday – October 14 – although, as Gerry gleefully pointed out, "Glenn is four years older than me." The two men shared an interest in Fine Arts and Physical Education, and worked closely together in developing an extensive extra-curricular activity program for the intermediate grades in their school.

However, what is particularly interesting to me as a researcher is that both Glenn and Gerry chose to stay in the classroom as teachers and not pursue a career in administration. When beginning my research, I found it extremely difficult to find male teachers from this era who had spent their professional lives in the elementary classroom. The vast majority of their contemporaries had pursued a career in educational administration, moved to secondary teaching or left the profession altogether.

As I interviewed these two teachers, it became evident that their educational philosophies and approach to teaching were very similar. Both operated very democratic, child-centred classrooms. Both rejected corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure and adopted a problem solving approach to classroom management instead. Gerry and Glenn wanted their classrooms to be safe places for children, and they both use phrases like "get them involved" and "show them you are interested" when asked to explain the secrets of their success. Although they worked closely with colleagues, administrators and parents in their schools, and indicated that "visitors were always welcome", they were very protective of their relationship with 'their' students. Neither teacher adopted the kind of open door environment we observed in the teaching of Mary Wasylyk and Alice Halvorsen.

The similarities in their educational philosophy and practice may be related to shared experiences in childhood. Both men grew up as middle children in large families and were encouraged by their mothers to become involved in the education of younger siblings. While other children were 'playing' school, Glenn and Gerry were actually 'teaching' school, and out of the twenty children in their two families, they were the only ones to go on to university. Both developed an interest in art and literature which has lasted a lifetime, while their brothers all followed the interests and vocations of their respective fathers.

Glenn "preferred using brains over brawn." and wanted "to create something that would outlast me" [Interview 2]. Teaching allowed him to accomplish both these objectives. Gerry informs us that he "always wanted to be a teacher. No one pushed me into it. I just never wanted to do anything else." [Interview 3]. His natural inclination towards being a member of a helping profession was encouraged and reinforced by the behaviour of those around him. Both men strongly believed choosing teaching as a profession would give them the opportunity to make a difference in their world; a discovery they made early in their lives respectively as "Little Professor" and "Teacher in the Saturday School."

5.8 Margaret Shupe: Learning by Doing

Margaret Craig Shupe was born on May 9, 1921 in Bentley, Alberta, not far from where Alice Halvorsen began teaching 32 years later. Her father was a farmer and her mother a schoolteacher. In fact, Margaret is the only teacher in my study to have a parent as a teacher. Margaret believes her early interest in learning can be attributed to the housekeeper who looked after her while her mother was teaching.

> **The housekeeper my mother had before I went to school took quite an interest in me, and taught me how to cook, and how to read, and I've never ceased to read since then. So I was quite well prepared when I arrived at school. [Interview # 1, 1997 07 30]**

Margaret's formal education began at a rural one-room school called Centreview, halfway between Bentley and Rimbey in the Blindman Valley area of Central Alberta. When her mother received a teaching post at the neighbouring Chapel school, Margaret changed schools to be with her. She then returned to Centreview to complete Grades 6, 7 and 8 before attending a cooperative high school in the hamlet of Foreshee for grades 9 and 10. She continued her high school in Rimbey, Alberta, and then graduated from Grade 12 at Camrose Lutheran College (now Augustana University).

With the exception of a Grade 3 spanking, Margaret has very positive memories of her school days and her teachers.

> **They were good teachers, some of them rookies right out of normal school, but they got the job done. You have to remember that in the one room schools of that era some of the kids were really big, which made discipline a constant concern. I enjoyed learning, so attending school was a great joy for me, and I was seldom in trouble. [ibid.]**

However, in Margaret's opinion, none of the teachers could compare to her mother.

> **Margaret: And that's not just my opinion. I've been told by others who had her as a teacher that she was one of the best they ever had, and she was certainly the best substitute teacher in the area.**
>
> **Ed: What do you think made her such a good teacher?**

Margaret: My mother was a teacher John Dewey would have been proud of. Long before they taught us how to do Enterprise at normal school, my mother was doing something similar in the classroom. It was from her methods that I got my first introduction to the concept that education is "doing." When I was a student in her classroom I can remember her method for teaching physical geography. We brought sand, soil and water into the classroom and on a table we used these materials to build up different parts of the landscape. To teach us about nutrition she would have a feast once a month which we cooked on the kitchen stove in the school basement. In Physical Education she developed a good curriculum and even had a basketball court put up on the grounds of the rural school where she was teaching. She had the Enterprise method in her head! [ibid.]

Margaret and her mother in 1943

Unlike most of the teachers I interviewed for this study, Margaret's family tree is full of teachers. This fact emerged when I asked her where she thought her mother had obtained her innovative ideas about teaching.

Margaret: I really don't know, but I do recall that my mother's maternal grandmother taught her older children at home while they still lived in Upper Canada. Perhaps some of the concepts about education were handed down from each generation. There have been a lot of teachers in my family. My mother's home was right across the road from the local school and the teacher always boarded with my grandparents. Mother also had an elder brother who became a schoolteacher because he wasn't healthy enough to farm. So in Mother's immediate family, teaching was a fact of life.

Ed: What about on your father's side of the family?

> **Margaret: In my father's family there were teachers as well but I think it is fair to say that my mother was the one who motivated them to go in to teaching. First of all, she was earning money; second, she was able to inspire her students to learn. Two of my father's younger sisters became teachers - probably as a result of her example. My father's mother saw teaching as an opportunity to free her daughters from the tyranny of the farm. [Interview # 2, 1997 11 18]**

However, despite being surrounded by teacher role models, Margaret wanted to become a nurse.

> **But my father said no, because he felt that nurses worked far too hard, and received far too little pay. He was impressed with the pay that school teachers got because he knew what his wife was making. It was just, 'That's what you're going to do Margaret. That's it. You are going to become a teacher.' It was entirely decided for me. However, teaching seemed a good alternative to any of the things otherwise available for women, including becoming a farm wife or hired woman. So in the end, I was really very happy to set out on a teaching career. [ibid.]**

Although Margaret would have preferred to stay in Camrose and attend the normal school there, it was 1939 and Canada had joined Britain in declaring war on Germany. As a result, the Camrose Normal School had been converted to military use and the staff transferred to Edmonton.

> **Once I got used to the idea, I enjoyed my time in Edmonton. We had some exciting times at dances and other social activities. There were a lot of young men that I would liked to have snaffled off with, but I was never quite smart enough to do that. That's the story of my life as a younger woman. Of course, no one had any money, so we had a good time without it. [ibid.]**

Margaret began teacher training just as the Social Credit government was introducing the Enterprise into the Alberta School System. She was pleased to be able to make a connection between what she was being taught in normal school and her mother's approach to teaching.

> **I had very good instructors, and what they were teaching me was consistent with what I believed. The idea of 'learning by doing' really appealed to me. Donalda Dickie taught us how to make language meaningful and how to teach reading. We learned how to teach science by "doing" science. The Enterprise method was just starting in 1938 when I was at normal school. We probably had the best authorities on that subject as our teachers that year. [ibid.]**

As was usually the case with 'Normalites' as the graduates of the teacher education program were referred to, Margaret went back to her home district to complete her final practicum. This was fairly typical, as most of the normal school students in that era were from rural Alberta. (Only 22 out of the 230 students in Margaret's yearbook list Edmonton or Calgary as their home address).

> **I was actually supposed to do my practice teaching at Easter, but I had caught pneumonia by standing out on a porch in the cold after a dance talking to a young man, so it was June before I completed it. I went to Chapel School, where my mother had taught for three years. I really enjoyed it there, as my sponsor teacher had much the same ideas as I did, and we really got along. It's quite funny, but I met a woman at our church who was in Grade 2 in the class that I taught that spring, and I had forgotten all about her. She was quite disappointed that I didn't remember her, but I said, 'Well, how would you expect me to remember those little children when I had all those nice young men to teach?' [Interview # 2]**

Commentary

Margaret was a delight to interview. She answered questions and shared stories from her past in a direct, unequivocal manner. Whereas I suspect at least some of the life stories recorded in my research were 'edited' - either consciously or unconsciously - Margaret was the most open of the ten teachers, both in admitting her errors and explaining how she learned from them. That is why I decided to include her in this study, even though her training did not occur within the time guidelines established for my research.

Margaret's story also adds credence to the belief held by many revisionist historians that there was little change in the career opportunities for women after World War Two. Although they did not enter the profession for at least a decade after Margaret, Peggy, Alice, Mary and Pauline faced the same limited selection of career possibilities as bright young women did before the war. In addition, in the case of both Pauline and Margaret, the *choice* of profession seems to have been made for them by fathers with what could be construed as an Edwardian view of the family hierarchy.

> **I guess I felt I was being led. I was happy to be going on to higher education because you realize in those days, young women had very few choices. They could work in a bank, they could be a nurse, or they could be a school teacher, and the other possibilities never occurred to me after dad said, 'I want you to be a teacher.' You have to remember that the common**

> **decision of men in those times was not to educate their daughters, and mother and I were rather anxious that my father stick to his decision. [Ibid.]**

In her insightful essay "Canadian Women and the Second World War" Ruth Pierson (1998) concludes with the argument that once the conflict was over, the immense contribution women made to the war effort did little to secure them an equal place in the post-war society of Canada.

> **Useful as low paid female labour in the public sphere was, state and society remained convinced that women's primary function was to bear and rear the next generation as well as to keep house and create a home for the male worker... Barriers to women's employment, removed during the war, dropped back into place in many sectors. [p. 11]**

Margaret's life history shares a number of elements with other teachers in this study. Like Pauline, part of her destiny was determined by the expectations of her parents, in particular a father who 'announced' that his daughter was going to be a teacher. Like Mary and Peggy, her initial choice of career had been nursing, and like them, she believes it would not have been a wise one.

> **It really turned out for the best. I discovered later that I would not have been a good nurse, because I suffered from sympathetic illness every time anybody around me became ill. [Interview 1]**

Although her father, to quote Margaret, may have "run the show", it was her mother who had a profound influence on her. Having her mother as a teacher provided her with a double role model: here was a strong willed, independent woman who successfully combined careers both in and out of the home.

> **I believe my mother influenced me in considerably more than my father did. Father was very quiet, so I really paid attention when he spoke! But it was my mother who made things happen in our family. She was the glue that held everything together. I was also impressed with how as my teacher she inspired me to get busy and learn, and how well her teaching methods worked, especially with the more able children. [ibid.]**

Margaret's mother also helped ensure a professional future for her daughter by her community leadership in helping to set up a cooperative rural high school.

> **Having a high school in Forshee meant that young people from the four neighbouring school districts got to go to school instead of going to work right away, or going back to farming. The school was an abandoned farm**

> **house and there were between 15 and 20 students. We had home made desks and a minimum of equipment to work with, but I've always been very impressed with the imagination of those farmers in setting it up. My mother, by the way, was the only woman on the school board. [ibid.]**

The Progressivist views of her mother, reinforced during her normal school training, helped to determine an approach to teaching that Margaret would utilize throughout her career. Margaret's mother was a 'doer' and believed children should learn the same way.

> **I believe the progressivist approach played a large part in my career. Everything I'd ever seen or experienced was reflected in my planning or teaching. My belief that learning should be a pleasant experience I borrowed both from John Dewey and my mother - children should learn by doing. They also taught me that much more is accomplished if students are inspired to work together rather than being forced to do what the teacher commands. [Interview # 3 1998 07 03]**

5.9 Anne Rasmussen: Learning to Play All the Notes

Anne was one of three teachers in my study who accepted my invitation to construct an autobiography as part of the collaborative research process. In it, she has included a comprehensive description of her early years. The following excerpts are taken from the opening chapter of her life history.

> **I was born in my parent's log cabin at Flatbush on February 5, 1931. The day before I arrived, my mother and dad had just finished digging the well beside the cabin. Mother told me she used the water from the well to bathe me. I have many recollections of happy memories of my childhood days on the homestead. We didn't have much money, but my parents were very sincere, hardworking people. We were a very close-knit community and the homesteaders often got together to play cards or to have parties. During the Christmas season the Ukrainian community would have a series of parties that began with the Gregorian Christmas Eve (December 24) and end with the Julian Calendar New Year (January 14). Everybody seemed to have a wonderful time as they joked, laughed and enjoyed each other's company to the fullest...**
>
> **When I began school in 1937, little did I realize that I would continue doing so for the next fifty years of my life; first as a student and then as an educator. As I look today at my start in school I often marvel how one was able to progress in an ungraded school with a large enrollment and no special program for pupils who spoke not one word of English. I was one of those "English as a second language students". My six years in Flatbush School provided me with skills that encouraged me to continue and to enjoy getting an education. All my teachers helped me acquire skills and**

> **develop characteristics that would overcome obstacles in the process of learning.**
>
> **My Grade one teacher, for example, was very strict. My friend and I got the strap for making a slight commotion when we were asked to come up to the front and stand in line to read. We lived in fear but became very good listeners. We always heard the instructions but often did not understand them. Though I didn't know one word of English on the first day, I somehow passed to Grade two.**
>
> **My Grade two teacher was a kind, determined lady. I can remember the many drills we did to learn vocabulary and number facts. We were sent out in pairs outside. We would sit in the shade of a bush in summer and drill each other.**
>
> **My grade three teacher was an environmentalist. He often took us on nature hikes and pointed out various plants and birds in the bush. Later on, when I took a course in botany at the university, I could identify all the wild plants displayed without much effort. Mr. Johnson's efforts to teach us about nature had a profound impact on me.**
>
> **My grade four and five teacher integrated Social Studies with Language Arts. She also taught about the history of Britain. We were asked to memorize the names of all the kings who reigned in Britain, and we had to learn what happened during each king's reign. We also learned many patriotic songs. All of this trained me how to study...**
>
> **After Grade eight I stayed at home for one year, as there were no classes to attend. Some of my friends went to work as helpers on farms. As I stayed at home helping with the farm work I longed to go to school. [From Anne's story *Growing Up In Flatbush*]**

Anne completed her high school through a combination of correspondence courses and actual attendance, both in the nearby community of Jarvie and at Alberta College in Edmonton. Anne felt that these boarding situations helped her to become more independent and better prepared for life away from home. Nevertheless, she felt a great deal of support from her parents.

> **My parents were very supportive of everything I did. If I had wanted to get married and be a farmwife, fine... Since I wanted to go to school, they invested a lot of money that they didn't have. To pay my tuition and board they sold a load of cattle. This was a great sacrifice on their part. My Mom could have used a washing machine and Dad a new tractor. I will forever be grateful to them for this.**
>
> **Ed: So, you felt a lot of support from your parents, but not pressure?**
>
> **Anne: Yes, they really didn't pressure us into excelling. But you know, even though they didn't speak English, I came from a very literate home. My parents read the Ukrainian paper, and they talked about it, so I think my brother and I developed an interest in both international and current affairs. My mother was by far the cleverest. She should have gone to school because she read beautifully, and she could read Russian, Polish, it was**

> **just no effort at all. She was going to school, and then the war broke out, and after that, it was too late. [Interview # 1, 1997 08 21]**

Anne was also very influenced by her best friend, Tilly. This friendship carried over into their adult relationship and Anne believes that if she had not had the chance to work as a correspondence supervisor, her later life might have resembled Tilly's.

Tilly and Anne 1965

> **Tillly was my best friend in school, and we somehow had common goals. We were always interested in books, and we were always interested in reading. Tilly kept in touch with me for many, many years. I even have a little poem that she wrote, how lucky I was to go to school. Her main desire was always to complete her school, but her dad wasn't willing to spend the money. So she got a job working in the hospital, got married to a local fellow and never did go to university. I had applied for a job in Fawcett to work in the store, and they couldn't use me. Now, if I had gone to work in that store, I possibly would never have become a teacher. There were plenty of young men around. I might have ended up a farmer's wife. [ibid.]**

The interest in learning she shared with Tilly and her parents' encouragement to go to university had convinced Anne to continue her education. However, like Mary, Pauline and Peggy, teaching was not her first choice.

> **In 1950, my goal was to be a nurse, but I lacked the 100 credits that I needed to be able to enroll in the Royal Alex program. In the meantime, I needed a job. I knew there was a real shortage of teachers, so I wrote a letter to Mr. Kunelius, the Westlock School Superintendent, and asked if there was an opening for a correspondence supervisor. He replied immediately, stating that there were two schools without teachers and I could choose which one I wanted. I convinced Tilly to come with me, and she chose Crowley and I chose Blue Hill. [ibid.]**

Although Tilly didn't enjoy teaching, Anne was very successful in her role as correspondence supervisor. It built up her confidence level and convinced her that teaching could be a wonderful job. She enjoyed helping children with their schoolwork and found that she had a new status in the community.

> **I was enjoying my supervising position very much. Every day was filled with new adventure both in the classroom and in the community. For the first couple of weeks after school, I was surprised to find a young man waiting to drive me home. Quite often in the evening someone would come down too. We played cards and drank coffee till midnight. I guess the bachelors in the community were checking out the prospect. [ibid.]**

Anne might have been content to continue in this role for some time, but once again the school superintendent was to play an important part in determining her future.

Anne Danko Age18

> **Mr. Kunelius visited me in November of 1950 and said I was doing 'splendid work' and that "You'd hardly know that a teacher wasn't present.' However, he returned in April and informed me that I would be replaced by a 'real' teacher in May. He suggested I finish my high school so that I could consider entering teaching. By this time I knew I wanted to be a teacher. I hated to give up my class because I loved the work. There were days I prayed the teacher wouldn't show up, but she did. For May and June I moved back home to work on completing my correspondence courses. Some days I spent up to sixteen hours on them, I was so motivated. When the results came in the mail they were accompanied by a letter from Mr. Kunelius congratulating me on passing all my courses. He offered me a $300 bursary plus tuition for a year of teacher training. There was no question in my mind that I would accept. It was exactly what I wanted to do. [From Anne's autobiographical sketch "Teaching at Blue Hill"]**

Anne entered the Junior E Program at the University of Alberta in September 1952. She found her correspondence school experience was very helpful, particularly during her practice teaching. When queried about her professors at the university, she remembered Dr. MacGregor whose approach to Science education reminded her of the nature field trips taken with her Grade 3 teacher. Anne made several connections between her own schooling and the Junior E experience.

> **My elementary teachers definitely had an impact on my teaching. I knew it was important to have discipline. Then when I got to university, my professors were stressing this as well. They also gave us ideas on how to motivate students and keep them on task. It was such a practical program and I was so eager to learn. I knew I could put these ideas right to work as soon as I completed my training. [Interview # 2, 1997 11 21]**

Near the end of the second interview, Anne suddenly recalled an incident involving one of her university professors that she had not recalled in years. The story provides an appropriate metaphor for beginning teaching.

> **I just remembered my university music teacher! She had a lot of problems teaching us to play the recorder. One day I was playing my recorder, and I was looking at this girl next to me, and I thought, 'Oh, she's playing well', and here I am just playing a note here, and a note there, because I'm not very good at it. So I said to her, 'Gee, you play well.' She said, 'Really? I was thinking you do, too!' So, obviously everybody was playing some notes at the right place, but not all the notes. I can't remember the teacher's name, but I remember wondering, 'Did she know how well or poorly we were doing?' We didn't even know ourselves! [ibid.]**

Commentary

Many of the early influences on Anne's teaching career have been encountered already in the stories of other teachers in this study. There is the literate home environment described by Pauline and Alice, the encouraging parents mentioned by Thor and Margaret, and the supportive community mentioned by Peggy and Mary. There is even a story of a supportive and persuasive school superintendent recruiting another teacher candidate. However, Anne's pre-teaching history differs from that of her contemporaries in one important aspect: she actually taught before she was trained to teach. This was not the quasi-school experience shared by Glenn and Gerry at an early age; Anne was actually responsible for the progress and conduct of her students. In this excerpt she shares her feelings the weekend before beginning at Blue Hill.

> **Anne: On Saturday, I was on top of the world to think I would be teaching in two days. On Sunday, I tried to recall everything I could from my own school year beginnings. What did the teacher do? What did the teacher say? I went over and over the curricular material I'd been given. Even during the service in church my mind was on what I would do and say Monday. The next morning I got up early and literally floated to school with great excitement. I honestly can't remember what we did, but I remember the feeling of being in charge!**
>
> **Ed: Were you at all frightened by the responsibility?**
>
> **Anne: Ed, when you're 18 or 19, you think you can do anything! I'd had that one day of inservice with Mrs. Cunningham, and I had the course notes that came with the correspondence materials. I remember Mrs. Cunningham saying that it's important to have control, so I drew back to all my school**

> **days and tried to pick things I had heard in the classroom that I could use in this situation. In the rural one-room school, you were often called upon by the teacher to work with younger ones, so that helped. I don't know... I distinctly remember walking down that half mile road with my little plan as to what I was going to do, and I rehearsed, re-thought, re-did everything in my head. I don't think I slept the night before because I was so excited. I just thoroughly enjoyed it. [Interview # 3, 1998 07 11]**

In essence, what Anne was experiencing were the feelings often described by a student teacher on practicum or a first year teacher in the month of September. It is what Fuller (1969) refers to as the "survival" stage of teaching, and just like a beginning teacher, Anne tried to recall her own experiences in the classroom as a learner to provide her with some idea as to how she should proceed. Lortie (1975) has coined the phrase the "apprenticeship of observation" to describe these experiences.

The following September, when Anne enrolled in the Junior E program, she had a distinct advantage over the other student teachers. Having served what was essentially an internship at Blue Hill School, she was able to make some important connections between theory and practice.

> **I could certainly appreciate what my university teachers were trying to say. You had to have both a management sense and a curricular sense of the classroom, and in that way, the Junior E was very practical. You see, after Blue Hill I had an overview from Grades 1 to 8. I also knew what a classroom was. I actually had children there in Grade 2 that could not read, and Mr. Kunelius just said, read the teaching notes, do this, so I read those notes, and it worked. [ibid.]**

The practical experience as a correspondence supervisor, reinforced by her student teaching practica, provided Anne with the background necessary to make sense of what she was learning in the university classroom. Blue Hill also gave her something else.

> **You know, in many ways I think my teaching career really began at Blue Hill. It was a wonderful experience because the curriculum was all organized for you, and the kids were really learning. It just gave me so much confidence that I could do this job. Then Mr. Kunelius comes in and says, 'Miss Danko, you have a natural aptitude for teaching.' Well, he couldn't have said a nicer thing because that gave me even more confidence. I was meant to be a teacher. [ibid.]**

5.10 Jim Hunter: Martinets and Marionettes

Jim Hunter was born on November 13, 1916, making him the senior member of my research group. Jim grew up in the Drumheller area of Alberta and completed all of his schooling in that city. He was the eldest of five children, all of whom had successful business careers, although only Jim and his brother, Jock, went on to university. Jim described his father as a "jack of all trades"

> **Jim: Dad had a store for awhile and later went into the trucking business, but he was one of those fellows who could accomplish just about anything with his hands. He had an intuitive sense about mechanical things. He was also a man of his word. A handshake was as good as a contract. I learned a lot about personal integrity from my Dad.**
>
> **Ed: What about your mother?**
>
> **Jim: Oh, she was a housewife and partner in all of Dad's enterprises of course. Basically, it's from my mother that I learned to value the cultural side of life. There was a great compatibility between my mother and I. Mother was a very soft, caring kind of person, and I was the eldest, so she was sort of ambitious for me in terms of the way I dressed and spoke. I remember winning an elocution medal in elementary school, and I have a great picture of me at home with my fancy little suit on. Mom encouraged that sort of thing. [Interview # 3, 1998 07 23.]**

The insistence of his mother on cultural pursuits, as well as correct dress and deportment caused Jim some difficulty with his schoolmates. On occasion, he had to resort to fisticuffs to avoid the 'sissy' label, but it did not prevent Jim from developing a life long interest in the Fine Arts.

> **I remember this one kid, whose name ironically enough was Hunter, who gave me a rough time about the elocution and my clothes and so forth. But my Dad had taught me to box and I had the backing of some of the other boys in the neighbourhood, so once I stood up to him that was it. [ibid.]**

Jim said very little about his early childhood or schooling. He did recall one incident where he received "a smack on the side of the head" from his Grade One teacher after he informed her that "my mother can teach me better than you." His memories from high school, however, are more clearly defined:

> **Basically, I would say there were three teachers who influenced me. There was Miss O'Neill, my high school Literature teacher, who had a passion for her subject. She would get so excited in teaching Shakespeare that she would act out all the parts. It was kind of a riot, but she was so enthusiastic and so genuine that you couldn't help but respect her. But she also felt learning was serious business. One year she was up in Edmonton, marking**

> **departmentals, and she spotted my exam because of my handwriting. Anyway, I'd been a bit creative and defined "morale" as being 'more ale' as in 'more beer', and she gave me heck for that because she thought I should have known that. So, I liked her. I think she kind of liked me, too. Then there was Mr. Wooton, a very fine gentleman, who became a well respected principal in Edmonton. In many ways I think he was very progressive in his views, and I do remember one event that had a real impact on my later teaching. Mr. Wooton invited an artist out of Calgary, quite a famous landscape painter named Gissing, to our class in Grade 8. He constructed a landscape for us on the blackboard using coloured chalk, and did the trees, and the mountains, and the water, and I was really impressed. But I also had a principal in high school that did anything but encourage me to make something of myself. I didn't have much respect for her. She gave me a real hard time. She taught French and was always calling on me to interpret, because she knew I wouldn't be well prepared. I wasn't prepared because my back was up. I just remember the sarcasm and the meanness in that. Instead of calling me out quietly and saying, 'James, you can do this, you know, you really can do this.' It was just the old sarcastic cut. I honestly don't remember a teacher who ever said, 'You could probably do anything you wanted to do.' [Interview # 1, 1997 11 04]**

Jim is unique in that he entered teaching much later in life than the other teachers included in my study. After graduating from high school in 1936, Jim worked initially with his father in the trucking business, and then spent a number of years with Imperial Oil. In 1941, he joined the Army Dental Corps and in 1942 transferred into the Royal Canadian Air Force. Jim qualified to fly heavy bombers and was slated to go overseas just as the war ended in Europe. He was discharged from the air force in 1944, and returned to his earlier career in the oil industry. It was not until 1947 that he decided to enter teacher training.

Jim believes that his work experience had a strong influence on the type of teacher he eventually became.

> **My dad was in trucking, and I was always anxious to be there with him, driving the truck. So, I spent many hours waiting for him when he talked to farmers, and you know, that creates a lot of patience. I also saw the business side of my father and you learn a lot from that as well. But we had lots of adventures. There was also a bit of daring-do in me. I remember one day we were driving on a county road and there was a truck approaching, and I was gauging the distance between us, and I saw this place where another truck had cut this groove at the edge of the road. So, I followed that groove when we met this other truck. Well, you know, I'm off the shoulder of the road, down in this rut, and it scared the hell out of my dad. But I thought it was a very clever move. I'd gauged everything correctly, and to me, it was so simple a decision to make. I'll follow that rut. I'll just**

> **drive right down into that rut and out again and I knew it would work. So, that was a bit of a rebellious thing, I guess. [ibid.]**

After trying the oil business again for a few years, Jim decided to use his veteran's education allowance to train as a dentist.

> **My younger brother, Jock, came back from overseas, and insisted that we were going to go to university as part of the DVA thing. He decided on Engineering, and he was fairly influential in me being at university at all. Anyway, I had some experience as a dental assistant in the Army, and so I registered with the DVA to go into dentistry, but one of my former instructors had gone to the January session in dentistry, and he didn't make it. So, that shook me up a little bit, and I probably made a wise decision when I went to DVA and said, 'I've changed my mind. I'm going into Education'. [ibid.]**

Jim Hunter and his brother Jock 1939?

Jim's subsequent decision to train as a teacher was based on very practical considerations. Here is his response to my question: "Why teaching?"

> **I think my decision was made partly on the basis of opportunity for funding of my training, and family considerations in that I had already had a daughter. My second child was born on the last exam of my first year at the university. There certainly weren't any teachers in my family to influence me, and I've already talked about my own teachers. No, it was a question of economics...career, the need to get to work, the need to be employed, and so on. I also had this romantic notion of raising my family in a small prairie town; you know, the good life, a peaceful life. The irony of that was I spent my whole career teaching in Edmonton. [ibid.]**

Jim was 31 years of age when he entered the three-year B Ed program at the University of Alberta. He found subsidized housing at the former U.S. Air Force Base on 106 St. and settled in to university life.

> **It was a good collegial thing that we had at the air base. Nobody had any money, so we were all in the same boat, and I think we were pretty focused. We'd been around, we had stories to tell, and a life to live, and we were doing it, you know. I think at the university we set a pretty high standard, and really pushed the marks, and the opportunities. We meant business. We had to graduate and were damn serious about it. [ibid.]**

Jim was also old enough to have some definite ideas about how to teach and how not to teach, and his military experience had convinced him that schools should not resemble basic training.

> **Jim: I watched this one demonstration lesson at one school, and this guy was the principal and it was awful. The children were like marionettes, you know, manipulated by strings, by commands and all that, and I suppose that was his idea of Phys Ed. To me, it was no better than boot camp. It didn't leave the children much dignity, or space or room for exploring their own ability. I guess it was part of my own experience that I would see that side of the thing. [ibid.]**
>
> **Ed: This isn't just the rebel emerging once again?**
>
> **Jim: Perhaps. I had done both the army and the air force, and parade square stuff was always a pain. I couldn't understand that. I always felt it was very stupid, you know, slope arms and all that crap, so I wasn't necessarily enthralled with the military. Part of it, too, was society; we expected the children to sit still and learn. You had to have control, there was no question about that in the '50's. You got into trouble if you didn't have classroom control, either through parents or the administration, or the pupils themselves, if they sensed they could give you a bad time. But that didn't mean you should treat them like puppets. [ibid.]**

Commentary

Like Margaret, Jim had very definite ideas about teaching before he entered his first classroom. Where Margaret had been influenced by her mother's example as a teacher, Jim was influenced both by his experience in the military and by teachers who dared to be different. He also resembles Thor in that he was comfortable enough in his decision making ability to assume an administrative role relatively early in his career. However, Jim felt his self-confidence stems from his ability to weigh consequences and plan ahead, as illustrated by his 'rut in the road' story.

> **I think I inherited some of that [leadership ability], but that was also my nature. In curling, for example, I never doubted that I could skip, and I never felt that I couldn't do a job as a leading teacher, or do a job as a consultant, or as a principal. I think I had confidence in my ability to see ahead. People used to say you worry too much, and I always wondered about that because perhaps it looked as though I was worrying about things, but I really hated the idea of crossing a bridge that I didn't know about. *I've always anticipated what's down the road.* [Italics mine] I've always been an anticipator, and I hate getting caught short in terms of not having seen the consequences of something or other. [ibid.]**

Jim also possesses unique personality traits from each parent that impacted on his teaching and administrative style. The high level of personal integrity he admired in his father is present, along with his dad's tendency to view the world as 'black and white'. As Jim puts it, he was never one to "suffer fools gladly" and there was a definite no nonsense element in his teaching.

> **I didn't have a lot of patience with students who would not make an effort. I used to tell them that even horses could be taught the times tables, to tap out the answers. And Spelling. I used to tell the children that if you misspelled words that you could spell correctly by looking the word up, and you misspelled them in a letter to a friend, or an application for a job, you were being unmannerly. It wasn't poor communication necessarily, as the person who read it could understand it, but it was just something that you should work on, to be mannerly. [Interview # 2, December 18, 1997]**

From his mother, he inherited his love of and sensitivity to the arts. He was involved with music festivals, drama productions and art displays throughout his career. Jim shared the following story with me during our first interview, which I feel reveals a great deal about the sensitive, artistic side of his character.

> **I think I see some of Miss O'Neill's enthusiasm in my teaching. I think I could bring children to enjoyment. I taught quite a lot of music, and I know for some of them I was probably a terrible task master, but I think most of them went along with it because of my sincerity about it. I suppose I might as well tell you this story. I had been lathering this class with a complicated art song, very old English art song, called Nymphs and Shepherds. Well, even the title would be laughed at these days, I suppose. But it's just a beautiful little song. Now I could only play the melody on a piano, but I could tell something about the words, and how the rhythm sounded, how it had to fit together, so to speak. I was really enthusiastic about getting this particular song note perfect, and tempo perfect. So, I guess I gave the kids a fair amount of trouble in terms of instructing them on this. Anyway, before the concert we had two practices with a real**

> **pianist, an English lady, and the first time she sat down and actually played the thing, I had to get out of the room. It just flooded me. {Long pause.}**
>
> **E: The memory still moves you, Jim.**
>
> **J: Sorry. Yes. Even after all these years. Yeah.**

Jim's "Nymphs and Shepherds" story evoked a deep personal response in him, even though the event occurred nearly fifty years ago. It reveals much about a teacher who, like Pauline, had high expectations of his students in math and spelling, yet shared with them his love of beauty in art and music. Richard Meyer, in *Stories from the Heart* tells us that the stories we decide to share to illustrate some aspect of our belief system often reveal more than we intended because

> **When I tell a story with passion, commitment, motivation and intensity, I am telling a lot about the story and myself and I am taking a risk, making myself vulnerable and asserting who I am. [1996, p. 120]**

Jim struck me as being a very private person, a quiet, reflective individual who was uncomfortable talking about either his mistakes or his successes. Nevertheless, what he did share appeared free of the hyperbole and bias that often characterizes our retold and reconstructed life stories (Myerhoff, 1979).

As we examine Jim's life history in search of early influences on his teaching, we have the advantage of reviewing not only the experiences of childhood and adolescence, but the first decade of adulthood as well. We see how driving from farm to farm with his father Jim learned to be patient, to listen carefully to the words of his father and others and, when given the opportunity, to be resolute in his decision making. During his military service, he experienced first hand the consequences of inflexible rules and insensitive leadership. These lessons and observations helped shape his unique approach to teaching.

> **I think as a result of my own upbringing and perhaps the military experience I was a bit of a disciplinarian, but I think I mellowed out over the years. I hope that I always had some humour associated with what I was doing, that I wasn't grumpy, and growling, grouchy, and carping, and all those negative things. That's not how I would want to be remembered. That's not how I remember myself. [Interview # 3]**

Jim retired in 1979 after 28 years in teaching and administration. "Mae", a colleague of Jim's whom I met at a retirement tea, had the following comment to make about this complex individual.

> **When he was principal at Princeton, he could put the fear of the Lord into the Grade Sixes, just by looking at them. But the little ones? The primary kids? No way! They weren't fooled by that tough, gruff exterior for even a minute! [June, 1998, Knox United Church Hall, Edmonton.]**

5.11 Summary

Woods (1987) has commented that it is important to study the early life history of teachers because we know very little about how their pre-teaching biographies have effected their pedagogy. Each time I read over the early biographies of the ten teachers in my study, I gain new insight into the factors that shape our individual lives as teachers. As I listened again to their descriptions of their childhood and adolescence, I found myself revisiting my pre-teaching years to see if similar influences existed in my own background. I wondered how many of us chose teaching as a profession because we were raised in a culture of caring, in an environment that modeled for us the need to take interest in and responsibility for those around us. The most vivid memories for many of the retired teachers I interviewed relive early life events where they learned how satisfying it can be to help others and be recognized for doing so. Gerry recalls his childhood nickname of 'Professor' with pride and Thor remembers the principal who took a personal interest in his well being. Mary, who fondly recollects the warmth and comfort of story time with her grade one teacher, is delighted when she encounters a former student at a reunion:

> **I was her teacher in Grade 2, and she was already married with two teenage children and she said to me, 'Mary, will you read to me one day?' And I said, 'Read to you?' And she said, 'Yes. I just loved it when you read to us.' That just shocked me. I never fully realized the impact of my teaching until I heard this grown woman say that. I guess the things you do, so many of these little things, you don't know their rippling effects. [Interview # 1]**

Britzman (1986) believes the "institutional biographies-the cumulative experience of school lives" that beginning teachers bring with them have a significant impact on their own teaching [p. 443]. Regrettably, many of the retired teachers in my study had entered the profession determined to do a better job than the role models they had experienced as students in elementary or secondary education. It seems that negative school experiences can motivate us to enter the profession as well as positive ones, and they have a profound effect on our behaviour in the classroom as well (Lortie, 1975). Glenn, Thor, Gerry and Alice all related stories about corporal punishment during their own schooling which resulted in their refusal to use the strap in their own classrooms. Jim shared his story of the high school French teacher who "did anything but encourage me to do better" and "made me realize kids need someone to tell them they can do the job." In fact, the majority of the teachers in my research shared stories of their teachers using both physical and verbal abuse as management techniques and resolved never to do the same.

The credit given by the retired teachers in my study to their parents in terms of influencing their decision to teach by both example and encouragement is consistent with the findings of both Knowles (1992) and Woods (1984). These researchers report that parental values and views of education frequently had more impact on the pedagogical style of beginning teachers than their university training. Zeichner and Tabachnick (1981) also found that early home and school experiences played a greater role in determining teaching practice than either student teaching or pre-service training. This finding is consistent with a study by Butt et al., (1992) which indicated that teacher education is seldom mentioned as a formative influence in teacher biographies, and when raised, it was usually in the context of an outstanding professor or supervising teacher. However, the results of my research indicate strong support for both the Junior E and Standard S training programs. As I have already shown in this chapter, the retired teachers who completed these programs describe them as "relevant", "practical" and "comprehensive" in preparing them for life in a rural classroom setting.

David Hansen, in *The Call To Teach*, describes teaching as a vocation; a word, he reminds us, that is derived from the Latin *vocare* or 'to call'.

> **...teaching as a vocation comprises a form of public service to others that at the same time provides the individual a sense of identity and personal fulfillment...The concrete source of that call may be one's own teachers,**

> **the influence of friends who are educators, or one's experiences working with the young in an educational capacity. [1995, p. 2-3]**

At some point during the interviews with each of my research participants I asked the question "Why did you choose teaching as a profession?" Some offered very practical reasons for their decision: "no money, and a bursary was available"..."it only took one year to complete the program"..."my second choice after nursing"... etc. Others, like Pauline, Margaret and Anne were influenced in their decision by significant others in their environment (e.g., friends, parents, school superintendents.) However, there is a third group within my study who indicated they felt *compelled* to teach.

- **It's all I ever wanted to do. Even as a kid, I just wanted to be a teacher. [Glenn]**
- **I knew I wanted to spend my life helping others and especially children, so teaching was just a natural choice to make. [Mary]**
- **There was no question in my mind that I would accept this offer. This was exactly what I now wanted to do. [Anne]**
- **I was going to be a teacher. And I went ahead just with that in mind, and I became a teacher. [Gerry]**

Hansen believes that many teachers enter the profession because their early lives reveal a pattern of becoming involved with others.

> **I would suggest that the reason they heard the call to teach has to do with their active lives up to that point. Without any prior or deliberate intent, all that they have done has fashioned them into people capable of hearing the call and of responding to it—a point worth underscoring because some may hear it but lack the courage or circumstances to act. [ibid p. 125]**

The question was a difficult one for the retired teachers to answer. Although some "knew" that this was the job for them, they were unsure as to what had attracted them in the first place. Doubtless they have been influenced by their upbringing, their 'institutional biographies', and their 'call' to serve humanity, but I also believe that their personal life histories reveal a love of knowledge itself, and a strong desire to share that knowledge with others.

CHAPTER SIX: TEN TEACHING STORIES

Technique is what teachers use until the real teacher arrives.

Parker Palmer (1997)

Introduction

This chapter contains a short summary of the professional careers of my ten research participants. It continues the story of becoming a teacher introduced in the previous chapter, beginning with their first teaching position and ending with their retirement. As it is not possible to adequately represent ten extensive teaching careers within this dissertation, I offer only a brief summary of the life history of each of my research participants in this chapter. In Chapter Seven, a detailed, thematic analysis of the professional lives of the ten teachers is presented. The themes identified in that chapter were extracted from the ten life histories using the NU*DIST Qualitative Data Analysis program.

As I stated in Chapter One, the purpose of my research was to help the small but significant figure of the classroom educator "spring to life on the tapestry of teaching" [p. 14]. At our first meeting, I had explained to each of the retired teachers in my study that I was interested in giving a voice to the 'typical' elementary classroom teacher - as opposed to those educational luminaries whose names end up in the history books. It is their life history, I explained, that will help educational researchers to better understand daily life in the classrooms of Alberta during the last half of the twentieth century.

In this chapter, I have used the "small stories" (Alexander et al., 1992) shared with me by the retired teachers to illustrate the important connections that can be made between personal narrative and the practice of teaching. After reading through the interview transcripts and the written contributions of each teacher, I have tried to select those stories and events which reveal how each teacher grew in their professional knowledge from the learning experiences that occurred both in and out of the classroom. These "small stories" also reveal a great deal about the educational philosophy and beliefs held by each retired teacher.

6.1 Alice Halvorsen: Change Is My Middle Name

Alice began teaching in 1954 with a Grade 4 class at Bentley, Alberta in the County of Lacombe. She had been interviewed by Edmonton Public, and offered a job by W.P. Wagner, but Alice decided not to accept.

> **I wrote back and I said, 'Sorry, but I would like to get some further experience in the country.' I'd heard that city schools were really difficult to teach in, and I wanted to get some country experience. [Interview 1].**

It turned out to be a very wise decision. The Bentley staff were a friendly, enthusiastic group who enjoyed working together. She felt supported and accepted by her new colleagues.

> **Bentley was a terrific school. There were two teachers that had been at university with me so we shared a house and all three of us taught at Bentley school. Bentley was a K to 12 school and there were at least four classes at each grade level because they bused kids in. This provided opportunities to go into different teachers' classrooms and see what they were doing, and then you could kind of try to copy, or emulate them... People would come into my room, and would say, 'Oh, I've got art coming up! I haven't got an idea in my head what to do!' And then other times it would be me who went into their classroom and say the exact same thing! And so we would share ideas and learn together. [Alice, Interview 2]**

Alice Halvorsen – Christmas 1957

Alice might have stayed with the County for several years, but her future husband, George, was living and working in Edmonton. Alice "wrote a letter to

Mr. Wagner requesting a job and got on right away in Edmonton, In those days there was no problem getting a job" [ibid.]

Alice was assigned a Grade 3/4 split at Crestwood School. She recalls this time in her career as extremely busy and herself as "very focused on the 'act' of teaching", as the following anecdote illustrates.

> **One time, this lady came to my door. I thought she was a parent. She knocked at my door, and I said, 'Yes?' She said, 'May I come in?' I said, 'Why?' I didn't know this lady from a hole in the ground! Well, then she came in, and I was somewhat embarrassed when she told me she was 'Miss' C, the Supervisor of Language Arts. Like, she was establishing her position, and she went through and looked at what the kids were doing. Of course, they were all doing what they were supposed to be doing, and then she came back and talked a little bit, and then she left. That's all it was. I still recall her being very stiff, very aloof, and probably her intention was to make me work harder, and better. I don't recall. [ibid.]**

Alice moved to Mt. Pleasant School the next year to be closer to her new home and husband. In 1958 and 1959, her two children were born and Alice did not teach full time again until she accepted a Grade 4 position at Crestwood in 1960. At this point in her career Alice had not developed the individuality in her teaching that would come in the next decade. Here she describes her daily routine in those early years.

> **Teach lessons on plans made the night before at home – my young family required me to be home somewhat earlier than later in my career when I never came home till after 5:00 p.m. I made extensive use of curriculum guides, teachers' handbooks and manuals. (My favourite expression which I wrote in my manual for the Up and Away reader was 'Is it just a job or a golden chance?' because I found my first year of teaching very stressful and I needed some reminding that I was fortunate to be working with these students doing this kind of teaching – slavishly using the manual, like a Bible.) We opened with The Lord's Prayer because I saw other teachers were doing it. I did it because everyone else had Opening Exercises and it looked like a good idea. (Email response, 1999 10 31]**

She remained at Crestwood until 1966 and then took a year's paid sabbatical to finish her B Ed degree at the University of Alberta. After her sabbatical her assignment to Richard Secord, an open area school, heralded a major change in Alice's approach to teaching.

> **Prior to going back to finish off my degree, I really was bored. Everything was running so smoothly that I couldn't stand it. I just felt, there's got to be more than this. What I learned at the university was to share responsibility for learning. Previously I was in charge; the be all and end all. I was the teacher, and they were the ones who were getting the learning. But then I went to Richard Secord, which was a co-operative teaching school. It was a team teaching situation, in a beautiful school with no walls and everyone working together. It was just wonderful! All these different kids! All these different people! I really enjoyed working with other teachers when I came back. I mean, it was the difference between night and day. [Interview 2]**

Alice remained at Richard Secord teaching Grades 5 and 6 until 1979. She then returned to the University of Alberta on a second paid sabbatical to begin her Masters in Education. In September 1980, she returned to the classroom and was assigned Grade 5 at Satoo School. The return marked another change in her classroom practice.

> **At Satoo, I was all alone in my classroom, so I pretty well felt queen of the castle again. It's close to the university so we had a lot of university parents who were very supportive. The children really were more knowing about the world. They knew more about appropriate behaviour, and if you made a slip, they were quite quick to tell you. Children wouldn't or couldn't have done so in the first part of my teaching career. [Interview 3]**

Alice retired in June of 1992 after 32 years of teaching at the elementary intermediate level. The biographical note prepared for her retirement banquet in June, 1992, states in part

> **Alice's abiding interest in Children's Literature and the Language Arts enabled her not only to teach her own students in an integrated fashion even before whole language became the buzz word, but also to give help to other teachers when she was an Integrated Language Arts project teacher. Alice feels that when life in the classroom became too comfortable and easy, that was the time she needed to reach out to the university for a fresh look at education. [*E.P.S.B. 1992 Retiring Teacher Biographies* p. 15]**

Alice was always concerned about becoming too comfortable in the classroom. As she commented in one of her email responses, "I don't remember ever looking back. I was very happy pushing the envelope, so to speak. It was an exciting time to be teaching with so much going on" [1999 10 31]. As Alice matured into a master teacher, her success and confidence in "pushing the envelope" encouraged her to explore alternative ways of delivering the curriculum.

> **I helped build the Language Arts curriculum in the 70s and 80s through my work for EPS. Often I was used a "guinea pig" for new methods. We worked putting together Enterprise/Social Studies units that were published for the use of all teachers. Then I began to make up my own units of work and found it exhilarating. [ibid.]**

In summary, Alice never quit growing as both teacher and learner.

> **Ed: Is reflection a quality that one can develop as a teacher through experience, or is it something that's more innate in an individual's personality?**
>
> **Alice: I think you can develop it because I think the university helped develop it for me, but I also think it's natural for a person to think back on what was working for them and to make adjustments where necessary.**
>
> **Ed: I don't know whether that's true or not. I've heard the expression that some people had the same teaching experience thirty-five times.**
>
> **Alice: Well, not me. Change is my middle name.**

6.2 Thor Lerohl: A Job That Chooses You

Thor began teaching in 1955 at Rosebriar School in the County of Wetaskiwin, southeast of Edmonton. Thor remained at Rosebriar teaching Grades 6-9 for two years to discharge his obligation to the district for receiving a bursary. He then accepted a position with Edmonton Public at North Edmonton School teaching Grades 6, 7 and 8.

> **I learned a lot at North Edmonton because it was a 'blue collar worker' school. It was also an area where people were losing it, or losing jobs, or finding trouble in the world. So I learned a lot about working with kids in really difficult situations. North Edmonton was where I started being able to get comfortable with the survival stage in teaching, the handling of kids, and the preparation of the curriculum. [Interview 2]**

In 1959, Thor was transferred to Killarney Junior High where he specialized in Boys' Physical Education and Grade 8 Social Studies. At this point in his career he began to feel that "things were coming together".

> **By the time I went to Killarney I was quite focussed on curriculum, becoming very much engrossed in particular with the Grade 8 social studies program. I then took a sabbatical to work on finishing my degree at**

> **the U of A. I went from there to the pre-employment program at Baldwin Junior High for a year and then two years at MacKay Avenue. (Interview 1]**

In 1966, Thor returned to Elementary teaching with a Grade 6 class at Gold Bar School. The district was experiencing growing pains and the large number of inexperienced teachers being hired required some assistance in lesson planning, resource use and classroom management. To alleviate this problem, the Board assigned successful, experienced teachers to support novice teachers on a part time basis. Thor was one of those selected, and after two years at Gold Bar he accepted a position with the district as an Elementary Curriculum Coordinator. The job involved working with teachers in eleven different schools from his base at Steele Heights, and proved to be valuable training for his later responsibilities as a school principal.

> **The Elementary Curriculum Coordinator job involved much more than helping them with curriculum and lesson planning. Often that wasn't even the problem! I remember once, at the end of the year when I was at Steele Heights, I came by this classroom, and here's this girl at her desk crying. I said, 'What's the matter?' She said, 'I can't do this register.' So, we sat down and basically, it was on slips of paper and it was a mess! An hour and a half later we got her done, but she was overwhelmed [Interview 2].**

From 1971 to 1975 Thor combined Grade 6 teaching with Assistant Principal responsibilities at three schools. He was appointed Acting Principal at Mount Royal in March of 1976 and took over as principal in September. Thor felt ready for the responsibility when it arrived.

> **I was ready to handle it because all my experience prior to going to Mount Royal had prepared me for the responsibility. In retrospect, I was always thankful that people allowed me to grow to the point where I was ready for a new job before I was given it. In that way I was trained; the university training and school district training, combined with experience all prepared me for the roles that I was given as I went through the system [Interview 3].**

In 1980, Thor was given the challenging task of opening the new Meyonohk School, which would eventually enroll almost 600 students. As principal, he had the responsibility of launching the Mandarin Bilingual program at Meyonohk before accepting a transfer to Baturyn Elementary in 1986. As principal at Baturyn, Thor "had the pleasure of seeing two groups of students go through from Kindergarten to Grade 6 before retiring in 1994, after 39 years in Education" [Interview 3].

Near the end of our third interview, I asked Thor if he would recommend teaching to someone considering entering the profession today. He thought for a moment and then gave the following response:

> **I would say that #1, you have chosen the most positive career possible. I think one of things that you have to know about this job is that you have to be able to put in a lot of extra hours because the students you will encounter will never fit that nice neat mold. Each one of them will be so uniquely different that often the things that you had thought would work won't. Children, throughout your entire career, will challenge you, excite you, and maybe even scare you. Know also that it is not a job given for the people who can't do, it's for those that must do. It's a job that in some ways, chooses you. [Interview 3]**

6.3 Mary Wasylyk: If You Ask Them, They Will Come.

As the reader may recall from Chapter Five, Mary began her teaching in 1951 at Half Moon Lake, a two room rural school near Waugh, Alberta. After one year, Mary moved to Egremont School and then returned to Half Moon Lake in 1953 with her new husband, Eugene. Eugene took over as both principal and teacher of the junior high students. He also served as janitor for the school, for which he received an additional annual allowance of $200. (The principal allowance was $100 per year!) Below is a picture of Mary's Grade 1 to 3 class at Egremont School in Northern Alberta.

Mary continued to teach at High Park until her retirement in June 1994. Although she was involved at various times in her career with other grade levels through classroom and resource room teaching, Kindergarten remained her first love. It was the predominant topic during the interviews and the source of most of her stories. She was extremely excited to have been a "pioneer" in the introduction of "universally funded kindergarten" which gave her the opportunity to translate newly learned theory into immediate practice.

> **The Program of Studies tells you the skill development that's needed, so you figure out a way to accomplish these skills in a non-threatening way. Teaching is mostly facilitating, because we know what a child needs, and can work towards that goal. I just loved teaching. I went to school each day happy to be doing exciting things.. [Interview 2]**

Mary feels that the concept of working together in the best interests of the children under her care was the key to her success. By creating a family environment in her Kindergarten classroom she was able to ease the home to school transition for each child. Here are three examples from our second interview that illustrate how she achieved this smooth transition.

> **I love to know about my students. I want to know about their families. I want to know about their pets, their special room, and how it looks, and something that they know about, and then I can relate to them. When they come to Kindergarten, I can say, 'I know about you, and you know about me, we already had a visit.' And it always felt so good, personally. So, it was just a natural thing to do [Interview 2].**
>
> **I remember a little grade one child that was transported on the school bus for an hour in the morning before he got to class, and because he was very young he was very tired by the time he got to school. He was ready to go back to sleep. I just felt, if you need to sleep, then go to sleep, and I will deal with you later, teach you later. So, he had a morning nap [ibid.].**
>
> **Sometimes a child came in and just kind of rejected everything about the kindergarten; like, 'I don't want any part of this, I just want my mom and things that I know that are familiar to me.' I quite understood then what was happening. I would reassure the child that it's okay to feel that way, and we'll just get on with what we have to do, and make you comfortable. So, I'd say, 'Okay, Mom, give your child a hug and a kiss and leave me something that would have your scent on it, like your gloves, or your scarf. Leave them with your child to take care of, and just tell them you will be back at a certain time to pick them up. That usually worked. [ibid.]**

These are good examples of the "microdecisions" (Combs, 1979) teachers make on a daily basis that are designed to increase the comfort level of the child at school. They are actions teachers take that are based on years of experience and an intuitive sense of what is best for the child. Mary had felt 'welcomed" as a child – both at home and at school - and was determined to recreate that welcoming environment for both children and parents in her classroom.

> **Teaching was never an onerous task. I mean, as long as you could work in partnership, it wasn't a lonely job. It was one where you worked together for the good of the child, and it was very satisfying...Parents help you in creating all these resources, because they themselves are resourceful, but they also know somebody in the community that can help. That was just something I learned in life in general: If you ask, people will help out when you need it. [Interview 2]**

6.4 Pauline Hahn: Finding the Comfort Zone

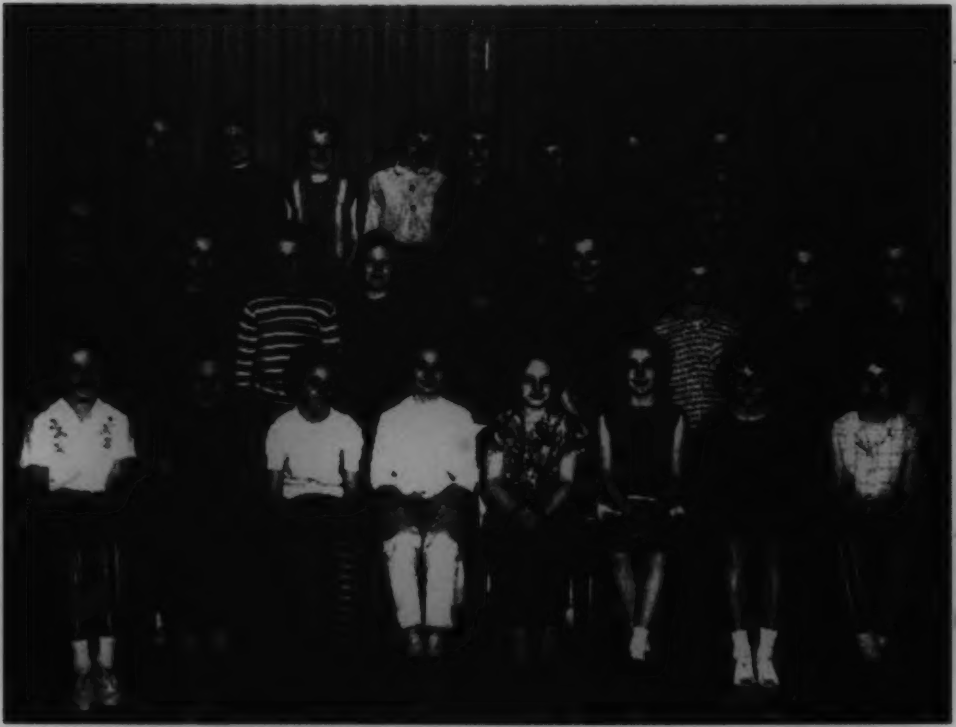
Pauline is the only one of the teachers in my study who never taught in an urban setting. Her first assignment was at Gamefield School near Boyle, Alberta where she taught Grades 1 to 9 from 1946 to 1948. Pauline remembers the many hours of preparation required in a rural school.

> **Board work took a long time. I guess I could have done it in the morning, but I never liked being rushed. In the winter time, I'd start the fire around 7:00, but it was still cold when the children arrived, so we would pull the desks around the stove in the centre of the room, as close to the heater as possible. I would stand close to the heater and I could teach any one of my groups that way regardless of which side they were on by moving around the stove. Very often the inkwells were frozen and so they would get these on the stove, or around the stove to get them thawed out. I can remember one day I had a white blouse on, and my back to the stove, and suddenly the ink well went poof! All over the back of my blouse! [Interview 2]**

Pauline's boarding house while teaching at Blueberry Ridge 1949.

Between 1948 and 1953 she taught at two other rural schools – Blueberry Ridge and Narrow Lake – before moving in to the town of Rochester in 1954. Pauline remained at Rochester until 1965, teaching Grades 3/4, 4, and 5/6. She recalls those years with a great deal of pleasure.

> **I think the teaching that I really enjoyed most was when I was in Rochester. It was small enough, and yet big enough. Big enough in terms of having a class, instead of multiple grades. This is where I felt that I was enjoying the things I was doing. There was a staff of six, so I wasn't all on my own as a teacher, and the community was very supportive. I was there for eleven years so I really got to know the children and their families. [Interview 2]**



**Pauline Hahn's Grade 5/6 class at Rochester, Alberta in 1963.
Pauline's daughter, Marlene, is fifth from the left in the front row.**

In September of 1965, Pauline accepted a position with the Westlock School Division at the Junior High Level and remained there until her retirement in 1984, after 34 years of teaching. During the third interview, I asked Pauline why she had remained at Junior High after finding elementary teaching so enjoyable.

> **Actually, a number of times I was tempted to return. When I moved to Westlock, junior high was all that was available, and I went into the junior high with great qualms. I had been working with Grade 4 to 6 the last couple of years, so at first I had hoped to get on at the elementary. It didn't present itself. And then after a while, with the curriculum changes and everything, and having sort of become acquainted with the junior high, I felt that was probably the best place for me to stay. [ibid.]**

Of the ten teachers in my study, I found Pauline to be the most critical of her own teaching. She felt that she had been very influenced by her classroom experiences as a student, and by the highly systemized methodology of the Wartime Emergency Training Program, and found it difficult to let go of that structure as a teacher.

> **I feel now that especially at the beginning I was very rigid. There was the community thing, but within the classroom things had to go according to plan. I don't know why. That's the way it was done when I went to school. Even when I had ten kids at Blueberry Ridge, I rang the bell to let them know that they were to get to their desks, even when they were all in the classroom. I sometimes think, was that necessary? Then they sat down in their own individual desks, and I got out my register, and I called each of their names. With ten kids was that necessary? [ibid.]**

Although Pauline felt she became more flexible in her later years, she was also not satisfied with the affective component of her classroom.

> **I don't know that I changed that much over the years. I think it took me a long time to realize the extent to which positive reinforcement achieves more than the negative. I think I was more inclined to tell students what they were doing incorrectly because I felt that was the way that they would learn. I felt that you have to know what you're doing wrong in order to learn. And I think it took me too long to realize that sometimes just telling students what they are doing right accomplishes more. [Interview 3]**

On several occasions I asked Pauline if she wasn't being too hard on herself. I pointed out the excellent teacher reports she had received, in addition to the gratitude expressed to her directly by many students and parents over the years. Here is a brief exchange between us near the end of the final interview.

> **Pauline: I don't think I made personal friends among my students. There was always that dividing line. I think it's sad.**

> **Ed: But didn't you mention a story to me of a teacher that had friends with her students and you felt it was somewhat unfair for the students who weren't included?**
>
> **Pauline: Yes. But there's a difference; I didn't like the idea of the pet, but a teacher didn't have to have pets to be friends with her students. I think that there is room for friendships, and it was difficult for me to develop those friendships with students.**
>
> **Ed: Why was that?**
>
> **Pauline: I don't know. Probably because of that insecurity and wanting to be in control. When I first went out it didn't occur to me that I could have one of my students as a friend, and yet they were very close to my age. Somehow I seemed to still maintain that distance, and maybe it was just there. Maybe I lacked the ability to communicate empathy. I didn't have that kind of a relationship where students come to you and tell you their problems, and I know teachers who did. You know, generally speaking, it never occurred to me that that should be a teacher role - to deal with their problems other than what was happening in the classroom. [Ibid.]**

6.5 Peggy Melmock: A Work in Progress

After completing her second year in Education at the University of Alberta, Peggy accepted a position at Guthrie School in Namao, Alberta with the Department of National Defence. Peggy's first class was Grade 2, and she enjoyed the experience tremendously. In fact, she would have been content to stay at the school except for a previous commitment to work for a year in Bermuda with a friend who had graduated in Pharmacy. When her friend backed out to get married, Peggy decided to go by herself. She accepted a position in Hamilton, Bermuda, teaching the public school equivalent of Grade 2.

> **Well it was different. No textbooks. You would pull the stuff out of the shelves and the cockroaches would be running. Schools were not publicly funded. At the first school I taught in, the headmaster hadn't allotted for paper, so we ended up doing everything on the backs of coloured business forms. I'd gone from a school that had everything, to a private school that was unheated, cold in the winter, and no supplies to speak of. [Interview 2]**

In many ways, Peggy's experience in Bermuda resembled that of the one-room schoolteacher in rural Alberta: minimal supplies, inadequate resources, and local board autonomy. There was also a lack of professional development to support an educational system designed for the Public Schools of Industrial Age

Britain. (See Cuban, 1993). What Peggy found particularly ironic, however, was that most of her students were not even Bermudan.

> **As a matter of fact I ended up in Bermuda teaching mainly American Air Force children. I just went from one set of military children to another! The American Air Force children had just come back from Japan, and their stories were wonderful. I remember one day I was doing an historical walk with the children, and this American woman comes up, and she said, ' Oh, I would like a picture of a typical Bermudan classroom.' 'Okay', I said, 'Fine.' I thought, 'Here I am a Canadian, some of the children are Portuguese, and some English Bermudans, but over half the class are American!' [Ibid.]**

In 1955, after a year and a half in Bermuda, Peggy returned to Alberta and taught for one year in Devon. She was married in July 1956 and followed her new husband to Calgary where he enrolled in the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology. Peggy taught Grades 1 and 2 in Calgary until 1967, taking some time off to have three children. She recalls the teaching experience in Calgary as professionally very unrewarding.

Peggy's Grade 3 class at Nob Hill School in Calgary. Valentine's Day 1960.

> **I think I found Calgary the hardest time of my life. I don't know whether it was because I had small children, whether we were financially so poor, or whether I missed being away from Edmonton, but I found teaching hard at that time. I found I was tired. I had so much satisfaction out of teaching in my first year, and the year in Devon, but in Calgary I didn't feel like the children were socially well adjusted and I didn't feel the support of the administration. Without that support it can be a very long year. [Ibid.]** ☐

Peggy returned to Edmonton in 1967 and taught Grade 3 for one year at Lynwood School. The return to the Edmonton area restored her confidence in herself and her teaching.

> **When I came back to Edmonton, it was just different. I was older, and my children were older and once your own children start to school, that is a real eye opener. I think for a teacher, when you're teaching, to see what happens to your own children helps you relate to the children in your class. When I was single, I used to think that a child should do so much work per day, regardless. But when I had my own children I realized that children had bad days and good days just like everybody else. So, you were a little more understanding, and I felt that it was really a good year. [Ibid.]**

The following year Peggy accepted a teaching position in the County of Strathcona where she had bought property. She taught mostly Grade 6 at both Campbelltown and Mills Haven Schools for sixteen years and then retired in 1984.

Over coffee after our second interview, Peggy confided that even after sixteen years out of the classroom, she still felt the urge to teach.

> **It was a wonderful career, Ed, but I feel as if I still have more to learn. But it's not getting any easier. After the intensity of teaching on a daily basis, it's fairly easy to get laid back in a hurry. I haven't done much with going back and taking courses, and things. I think that's the part where I've sort of been lazy. When I went to elder hostel last year, I tell you, my poor old brain was just like give me a break! But I'm still learning. [Laughs] They ought to put a sign on me that says 'work in progress!' [Interview 3**

6.6 Glenn Munro: Schools Are For Children

In 1955, the teacher shortage in Alberta remained critical and Glenn was able to graduate from the Junior E program and start teaching immediately at Mill Creek School in Edmonton. He was assigned to Grade 3, which, to the best of his knowledge, made him one of the first men to teach a primary grade in the district.

> **Where it turned up was at the convention in February at Garneau School. We were divided up by division and the Grade 3 sessions were all together. So all the Grade 3 teachers in Edmonton were in the gym and Don Massey and I walked in together. We were the only men there, so of course we sat together, and so on. But the chairman of each session always mentioned that it was nice to see two men. Several women remarked that they hoped that some day there would be a lot more men in primary, especially in the inner city schools like Alex Taylor where there is an absence of father figures for the children. So we really felt quite welcome. [Interview 2].**

Glenn convinced his principal, Mr. W., to allow him to stay a second year in Grade 3 at Mill Creek. He was then transferred to Avonmore, shortly to become the largest elementary school in Edmonton for some time.

> **Avonmore was a big school and there was lots going on. It was a good thing I was young and had all sorts of energy, because there were only three men out of more than twenty teachers on staff and we did a lot of Phys Ed, a lot of school teams and intramurals and so on. But Mr. W. taught me that those activities were important for kids. He said, 'It's a kid's world in school. It's not an adult world. It's only an adult world in the sense that we're here to guide them. We're not here to push our ideas unless those ideas are designed to help students.' I never forgot that. [ibid.]**

He remained there teaching Grades 5 and 6 until 1964 when he moved to Terrace Heights to work as an Elementary Coordinator. This was very similar to Thor's role at Steele Heights.

> **Sometimes I would just go in and observe the new teacher and maybe ask if they needed anything and sometimes I would take the class over while they went off to work on something. It was interesting, but I didn't like to be away from my students for too long. [Interview, 1999 10 27]**

Glenn Munro at Capilano 1966

In 1965, Glenn was reassigned to Capilano School, initially with roughly the same responsibilities he had at Terrace Heights. Glenn remained in Division 2, teaching 4/5, 5/6 and eventually Grade 6. He also combined classroom teaching with part time librarianship for ten years while at Capilano. However, it was the time in the classroom with the students he found most satisfying.

> **I had an awful lot of meetings with the kids when we should have been doing math, reading and so on, especially the first week or two of school. Much of that was just talking and getting feedback from them. What did they want in school this year? But we had a lot of those meetings and discussions, and I think then they knew that they could trust me and that I was genuinely interested in them. [ibid.]**

Glenn remained at Capilano for twenty-six years until retiring in 1991. At the time of this writing, he continues to substitute in several local schools on a regular basis.

6.7 Gerald Grover: My Place Was in the Classroom

As I mentioned in Chapter Five, Gerry had been secondary trained but was convinced by the Superintendent of Clover Bar School Division to accept an elementary position, a decision Gerry never regretted. He thoroughly enjoyed his year at Fort Saskatchewan Elementary.

> **It was just an exciting year. Young staff, we used to do a lot as a staff. We'd go to Elk Island Park and have picnics there. It was very much like a country school in many ways, although there were more children, and you had a few teachers to talk to. But we worked closely as a staff. We did a lot of laughing, and we included the kids in so much. We just had fun with them. We were a young group together, you see. I don't think there was an older senior in that staff at all. [Interview 1]**

At the end of his first year with the district, Gerry was offered a principalship at Calmar, a new school in the rapidly expanding district. However, his real desire was to teach in Edmonton where he had been raised, so he applied and was accepted into the Edmonton Public System. In 1954, Gerry was assigned to teach Grade 3 (much to his surprise) at Windsor Park School. He remained there for a second year with a 4/5 split and then transferred to Avonmore Elementary.

> **The principal that I had at Windsor Park was a great fellow. I really learned a lot from him. When he got promoted to a bigger school, Avonmore, he took me with him. He talked me into going over there. We had big enrollments in those days. I look back now and recall that we went up to 48, 49 kids per class. The district was booming. [Interview 1]**

In 1966, Gerry decided to move to another school. He remembers that his fellow staff members were quite surprised at this decision.

> **I stayed at Avonmore almost ten years, They were good years but I'd made up my mind that five years is long enough at a particular school. I stayed only four or five years in a school after that until I came to the last school, and then I stayed nine years again. I think it's very important not to stay too long in a school. After you've been there five or six years you need a change, the kids need a change. The staff, everybody needs a change. That gives you something more to look forward to. [ibid.]**

From 1966 to 1969 Gerry worked as an Elementary Coordinator based at Terrace Heights Elementary before accepting the Assistant Principalship at

Glendale Elementary in 1970. In 1974, he moved to Hazeldean Elementary as Assistant Principal and found this assignment particularly challenging!

> **Hazeldean was an outdoor education school, and I'm not a swimmer, so I took swimming lessons so I could be there. One year we went out for a few days, with the canoes to the lakes north of Hinton. Well, I hated canoeing, and guess who I had in my canoe? Three little girls that weren't very good at it, and it was a big lake to cross. Meanwhile the boys had jumped in the canoes and headed straight across the middle of the lake. And here I am with these girls and pretty nervous about the whole thing and I could see the weather was changing. So we stayed near the shore and took the long way around. I just remember being out on the lake, and thinking, 'Why am I out here?' But, I was now part of the Hazeldean Outdoor Program. [ibid.]**

The period as Assistant Principal and Elementary Coordinator marked the middle of Gerry's career and although there were many pleasant memories from this time, (e.g. the sports program at Terrace Heights and the Outdoor Education experiences at Hazeldean), he does not feel they were his best teaching years.

> **I enjoyed the first ten years more than the middle years. Once I got back into the classroom, I enjoyed the last ten years much more. So the first decade and the last decade I really enjoyed. The middle, I didn't enjoy as much. I was getting too involved in other things. I was busy meeting with people, working with the principal, doing things out of the class, and there were always other problems in the back of your mind that you had to go and attend to right after class. That was tough. [Interview 3]**

Gerry returned full time to the classroom in 1979 at Kildare Elementary and taught there until he retired in 1988, after 35 years in education. In our final interview, Gerry made it quite clear that he had no regrets about his decision to stay in the classroom rather than the office.

> **I wanted to be right with my pupils. I was very comfortable there. I don't think an administrator could be expected to be in a classroom, and that's why I never wanted to be a principal. I tried it. I filled in a number of times, but having a class, and having these other worries did not work out. You couldn't give the children your undivided attention. You had to be filling out forms, and signing letters for the secretary. I really enjoyed teaching and uninterrupted time with the children. So I left administration. I realized that the best place for me was back in the classroom. [ibid.]**

6.8 Margaret Shupe: Fourteen Schools and Every Grade

Margaret began teaching in 1939 at Whitecreek School located twelve miles west of Bowden, Alberta. She had just turned eighteen and found some of the Division 3 students to be a handful, as they were very close to her in age.

> **I had a good time but I felt some trepidation about the experience. People who were only a little younger than I surrounded me and I was expected to teach them, discipline them and fraternize with them. I also wanted to experiment with some of the new ideas I had learned in Normal School. So I plunged in. One of those bright ideas involved holding a citizen's court to decide how each child who needed to be disciplined should be punished. The students weren't too impressed with that experiment. I'm sure they saw it as an opportunity to pull the wool over the teacher's eyes. Another bright idea I tried was to catch a gopher and attempt to domesticate it. That didn't work too well either, and I'm sure the boys in the school tittered a bit about that silly schoolteacher trying to produce a pet gopher. I could see that some of my ideas were getting me nowhere fast. [Interview 1]**

In January of 1941, she asked for a transfer because "it seemed to me that I had become too friendly with the Whitecreek students and could not maintain proper discipline" [From Margaret's autobiographical notes on her teaching career].

Margaret was assigned to Clearview School near Red Deer and found this position challenging as well because of "an abundance of differently abled students" [ibid.]. She also recalls a strong military presence in the area due to the war. There was an Air Force Base at Penhold and an Army base in Red Deer.

> **My soldier boyfriend from Whitecreek had given me an engagement ring so I had to work to keep my mind on my students. According to my teaching reports I tended to the education of the students fairly well. [ibid.]**

In September of 1942, Margaret was transferred to Stephenson, another one room rural school that was only six miles from her parent's home. At the end of her second year at Stephenson School, Margaret decided to enroll in Summer School in order to complete her university entrance requirements. She then enrolled in the fall session at the University of Alberta.

> **During my two years at university I taught in Correspondence schools after my courses were completed in April. The first year I was assigned to a school near High Prairie called Shadow Creek. My students were impressed with the fact that I rode horseback to school each day, which I thoroughly enjoyed. The second year I went out to Crooked Creek School**

> **near Innisfail. In September of 1946 I applied for and was accepted as the principal of a three-room school east of Carstairs. My salary was now three times what it had been when I left Stephenson. [ibid.]**

Margaret enjoyed her first year at the New Bergthal School. She shared a teacherage with the other two teachers on staff. She also met a teacher from a neighbouring district "who wanted a wife and I wanted to be married, so on October 3, 1947, we were married and life was never the same again!" [Ibid.]

> **My husband left his school and was assigned to teach Division 2 at Torrington. Then his principal wanted to trade positions with me. I was reluctant but as a person with family responsibilities I felt I must make the move. In April 1948, I was assigned to the principal's job in Torrington School as well as teaching Grades 9-11. Needless to say, my object in the new school was to survive. [ibid.]**

Part of the difficulty Margaret experienced in secondary teaching can be related to her philosophical beliefs and elementary training. "Learning by doing" did not work well in a subject-oriented high school and school inspectors at this level had very definite ideas about how and what to teach.

> **Margaret: I recall the inspectors coming about twice during the school year. The happiness of the event depended on whether the inspector got stuck in the mud or the snow enroute to your school! The inspectors were basically concerned about how you were covering the curriculum. I recall being very frustrated by the marking system of the two kinds of inspections I experienced during the four years when I was teaching High School grades in the rural areas. The School Division inspector always thought I was doing wonderful work while the High School inspector did not feel I was doing too well.**
>
> **Ed: What were some of the differences you saw in their reporting?**
>
> **Margaret: The High School inspector seemed rather patronizing. He was always interested in "Minutiae"--he looked at details rather than at the over all picture. The School Division inspector was happy to see the teacher attempting everything and to see that order was being maintained. [Ibid.]**

In September, she moved back to teaching Grades 4-8 at the same school where she felt much happier.

> **When I started teaching I was inspired to allow the children to learn by doing. The longer I taught the greater my skills became in that type of methodology. I was not able to use that method when I was involved with High School grades. My style was marked by the philosophy of "be reasonable and do it my way." [Interview 1]**

Margaret left Torrington in April of 1950 to await the birth of her first child. In 1951, her husband accepted a position on the Big Horn Indian Reserve where her second child was born. These were not easy times, as Margaret recalls in her poem, *Reminiscing*.

Hubby was teaching and I was raising kids
In the lowliest hovel you can imagine.
There were mice, mice, mice;
Everywhere we looked.
Finally we moved into a much finer house in town
And when child number three was six weeks old.
I went back to teaching.

In December of 1953, Margaret took over her husband's Grade 1-6 teaching responsibilities when he became ill. After his recovery, she accepted a position at Nordegg School teaching Grades 7-9. The family moved to Gleichen, Alberta, in 1954 and Margaret substitute taught for three years. After the birth of her third child, Margaret accepted a position at the nearby Cluny High School teaching Grades 9-12. In 1958 she joined her husband who was now teaching in Edmonton. There she worked as a substitute teacher until her fourth child was born. In September 1961, she was assigned to teach Grade 4 at High Park School in Edmonton.

> **When I arrived in Edmonton and began teaching Grade 4 full time, my focus returned to my ideal of 'learning by doing.' I seemed to be inspired. I could organize the material, I could plan, I could test, and report on what we had accomplished. As our facilities improved and materials became more accessible, I emphasized 'themes and projects.' The students were very involved in everything but the planning. My last five years at High Park represented my greatest success in presenting ideas and subject matter so that students were inspired and anxious to learn. [ibid.]**

A change in administration and the imminent retirement of three senior teachers on the High Park staff influenced Margaret to transfer to Delton School in 1975. Margaret enjoyed the "multicultural flavour of an inner city school" particularly when doing Social Studies with her Grade 4's, but the first year was very intense.

> **I was 54 when I went to Delton and during my first twelve months I was trying to finish the last year of my B Ed program. Between July 1, 1975 and August 31, 1976 I completed six University courses. This was in addition to being involved in the annual Delton school concert, the staff parties and**

> **track meet as well as the interviews with the parents at report card time. I had no time or very little time left for socializing or collegiality. [Interview 2]**

Despite the workload, Margaret felt very successful in her three years at Delton. She felt she had done a credible job in a difficult environment.

> **My experience at the end of my third year at Delton was rather frightening. Without any previous warning I was informed by the principal that he didn't want me on staff any longer and if I didn't go willingly I would be declared surplus. This information, given to me on the stairs of the school, shocked me, to say the least. Fortunately, someone with my skills was needed at Norwood and late in the summer of 1978 I was transferred there. [Ibid.]**

Margaret was assigned to teach Grades 3 and 4 at Norwood and particularly enjoyed her time working with the Native students. Her earlier experience in this area was put to good use when she arranged a class visit to the Saddle Lake Reserve, which included an overnight stay. However, after five years in Inner City schools Margaret was feeling burned out. More importantly, she had been called by the United Church to work as a Missionary Assistant and English Teacher in Japan. Margaret took a two year leave of absence from Edmonton Public, but had no real intentions of returning to public school teaching.

6.9 Anne Rasmussen: Who Has Time to Watch the Clock?

Anne's first teaching assignment after completing her Junior E program in 1952 was with the Westlock School Division at Cumley Park School. There she replaced a Correspondence School Supervisor for the months of May and June.

Anne agreed to stay on at Cumley Park, but the day before school began the Chairman of the School Board informed her that there was no one willing to board her and she would have to stay in the teacherage. This was not a suitable arrangement and as a result, Anne went home with her father. A few days later the Superintendent, Mr. Kunelius, drove to her father's farm to see if she would teach in Gladwin School east of Jarvie. In her contribution to the Flatbush Community History (1986), Anne wrote the following:

> **Not only did I teach the fifteen students who were in Grades one to eight at Gladwin but I was also the janitor. I remember walking the two miles to school and starting the fire in the huge cast iron heater. At Gladwin School I put on a Christmas concert. I remember writing all the program items on a side board. My Mother and Dad came with a friend for the concert. When the friend saw the long list she giggled and told me afterwards, 'I wondered if we would get home before Christmas!' During the next term I taught a Grade 5 and 6 class in Fawcett. I taught thirty-five students in the old original two-room school. In the fall of 1954 I was transferred to Kingsway School in Flatbush. [p. 301]**

Anne's class of Grade 1,2 and 3 at Kingsway School in Flatbush - 1954

Flatbush proved to be a real challenge as Anne taught Grades 1 to 3 in a basement room with 33 children. Materials were at a minimum. Although she had some workbooks, most seatwork and assignments had to be put on the blackboard or run off page by page on a jelly pad or hectograph, the precursor to the spirit alcohol duplicating machines.

Anne remained in Flatbush until 1957 when she applied for a position with Jasper Place School Division adjacent to Edmonton. She was accepted and assigned to teach Grade 4 at Central School.

> **My first day of teaching in Central School was unusual. By noon over sixty students had registered in my class. Every desk had two occupants in it. Although the office of Dr. Willis, the superintendent, was located right in Central School, he was not known for his long range planning. Right away he advertised for a teacher, but by the time one became available my class had seventy students. [Anne's story, "City Teaching" November 15, 1997]**

Anne married Bjorn Rasmussen in 1958 and continued to teach at Central until she decided to take a year's leave in September of 1960 to complete her third year at the University of Alberta. An additional incentive for the year away from the classroom was the birth of her daughter, Catherine, on September 6, just weeks before she was to begin classes at the university.

On her return in September of 1961, Anne was given a Grade 4 class at Mayfield School and she taught there until taking time off for the birth of her second daughter, Pollyann, in 1964. Although she expected to return to Mayfield in September, Anne discovered that she had been reassigned to Grade 4 at Youngstown School. The district's problems with overcrowding continued and Anne became frustrated with large classes and too many children with special needs.

> **The principal, Mr. H. was trying to give us the help in reading, and I wanted it in arithmetic. So, I was letting him know this. I guess he became very impatient, and he got up and yelled at me. He said, 'Mrs. Rasmussen, you're never satisfied!' So, I went to my room rather disturbed about it, and I thought, 'Oh, gee, I've been here too long.' And at that particular time we got a notice saying that they were willing to give us leaves of absence with pay to go to university. I applied in order to finish my degree, so that principal did me a great favour. In the meantime, my kids were still going to Youngstown, and I went there one day to work at a tea. At the tea, Mr. H. came and sat at my table and talked to me. I thought, 'Oh, my heavens, what does he want?' But he didn't ask me to come back, and I didn't ask if I could go back. [Interview 2]**

Instead, in September 1970, Anne started teaching at High Park School (where both Mary and Margaret taught) and remained there until her retirement in 1991. Anne considered several times transferring to another school both for a change and for experience, especially when the administration at High Park changed, but she had heard from others that did move that they "had gone from the frying pan into the fire" [ibid.] so she decided to stay put. She certainly expressed no regrets over her decision to leave the country and move to the big city.

> **I could have stayed in Flatbush forever. I possibly could have stayed there and taught, married a local fellow and had a school named for me, or something! But I didn't. You know, there are so many possibilities in life. And you make your choices and live with them and teaching has been a good life for me. It was a good choice. [Interview 3]**

6.10 Jim Hunter: See ya, Boss!

Jim graduated from the University of Alberta with his Bachelor of Education degree in 1950. He worked on a survey crew for the Edmonton Water Works Department through the winter while he and his wife, Lucille, made up their minds about the future. Jim was now 34 and wanted to settle into his career.

> **I was going to go out and find an ideal, young little town to raise my kids. That was because I was thinking of the cost of housing and so on. But I went in and had an interview with W. P. Wagner, and you know, my God, I got on! I think it was a case of being in the right moment at the right time, but I guess we maybe saw each other in a favourable light. And that was it. I didn't go through the rural experience like so many others. [Interview 1]**

Jim was assigned to Prince Charles School (originally Sherbrooke School) at the Grade 5 level and taught Grade 5 or 6 at Prince Charles until 1957. Schools in the Edmonton area were feeling the impact of Alberta's economic boom and many classes averaged forty students or more. Jim's register for 1951-52, for example, list 47 students including transfers in and out during the month.

Among the artifacts that Jim shared with me was a copy of the visitation reports during his years with the district as a teacher. They provide a fascinating record of the progress of a beginning teacher into an experienced professional. Here are some excerpts from his reports while at Prince Charles.

> **Has been having trouble with discipline and organizing work. Skill uncertain but shows willingness and ability to profit from mistakes. Lesson presentation still weak. [Mr. R.S. Sheppard, 1951]**
>
> **Wins cooperation of class readily. Appears to enjoy his work and is making sincere efforts to master it. Planning, organization and lesson planning coming along better than before Christmas. [Mr. A.G. Bayly, May, 1952]**
>
> **Acts diffident about his ability, but is extremely conscientious. Does a great deal of extra work. Progress is good. [Mr. A.G. Bayly, February, 1953]**
>
> **Less apologetic about his ability, more confident. Makes a big contribution to school activities. [Mr. A.G. Bayly, May, 1954]**
>
> **Work progressing very favourably. Class quite interested and a reasonable amount being attempted. [Mr. M.W. MacDonald, February, 1955]**
>
> **Checked on work being done for planned operetta...a very acceptable job. [Mr. M. MacDonald, April, 1956]**

By June of 1957, the administration of Edmonton Public had decided that Mr. Hunter was leadership material and he was appointed Relieving Teacher. As the name implies, Jim's position required him to take over the class taught by the principal of the school, (usually Grade 6), while the principal took care of their administrative responsibilities. Jim was Relieving Teacher for a total of eight schools from 1957 until June of 1960.

> **Being a relief teacher was a hardship in a way because I needed a car, and I didn't have a very decent vehicle at the time. But I anticipated that this was probably a stepping stone to administration. Gosh, it was so difficult that first year. I not only had Grade 6 but Grade 8 as well at Wellington. I have no clue today how I did that; how I got through that year. [interview 2]**

In September 1960, he was assigned as Assistant Principal for H.A. Gray, a nine-room elementary school. Jim taught Grade 6 with .2 administration and remained at the school for two years. As it turned out, the next "stepping stone" in Jim's career was an appointment as a District Consultant for Division 2. He fulfilled that function for two years and was rewarded for his efforts with the principalship at McQueen School.

Jim's Grade 6 class at McQueen School in Edmonton 1965

> **McQueen was a fine school, good neighbourhood and a great staff, but I did have this one teacher who was a bit of a 'toothgrinder,' She was like that all the time; no smiles, just tough, tough, tough. The community had accepted this lady, and lived with her through many years of her teaching in that school. Well, I inherited her, and I had to accept her too. Anyway,**

> **this one day, these three girls were in the office, and I came in and I said, 'What are you doing here?' And they said '____ sent us in. We were throwing snow up in the air and running under it.' I said, 'But you knew who was on supervision.' They said, 'We know, Mr. Hunter, we're sorry.' So here we were in collusion! I said, 'Get out of here. Smarten up.' So, I think now about that poor soul, and how the community was so charitable to give this lady her angry stance about kids. And what a beautiful moment with those three girls, and our unspoken communication. 'We know, Mr. Hunter, we're sorry. We understand, Mr. Hunter, we understand.' [Ibid.]**

Jim was at McQueen until 1966, when he was given the principalship at Princeton School. Jim remembers feeling ready for the challenge, as Princeton was located in a tough area of the town. His experience in the oil industry and the military had prepared him for educational leadership in a working class community with discipline concerns at the school. Most parents were supportive, but teachers had to be firm and consistent. Jim recalls, in particular, one teacher who "didn't know how or when to pull the string, to bring the class back."

> **Not that he couldn't get their attention when he got into the subject area, his problem came during transitions. Things went all to pot. I remember I was in talking to him one day, and he had his back to the class, and I was looking at them. Now I was starting to tighten up on these Grade 6's because they were getting too hairy. I finally had to go in and threaten that if they were sent in to me I was going to hear them out the first time and the next time I was going bang them. So, I'm talking to this teacher, and there's a kid at the back of the room poking his neighbour. So, I called him up to the front and I said, 'Hold out your hand.' Then I hit him hand to hand. Well, my hand hurt all day! I really walloped him, but I paid for it. [Ibid.]**

Jim remained at Princeton until his retirement in 1979 after 28 years with Edmonton Public. One of my final questions concerned his decision to go into administration when he had found teaching so enjoyable. Jim offered the following story as part of his response to my question.

> **I wouldn't have had anywhere near the wealth of experiences that I had as an administrator, with staffs, with children. For example, here's a story I was thinking about last night. I loved the kindergarten, and I had a great lady, Mrs. Olsen, who had a way with these little guys. Well this one morning I went down to see them off on a field trip and there's this one cocky little guy because his brothers and sisters had gone through the school and he knew all about me. They'd warned him, 'You got to watch out for Mr. Hunter.' So, he had evaluated all that, and he had a lot of strengths because his brother and sister had given him the word. Anyway, he's walking out the door and he turned and said, 'See ya, boss!' [laughs] You know, that's got to be one of my favourite memories. [Interview 3].**

6.11 Summary

This chapter summarizes over 350 years of professional experience in the classrooms of Alberta. In the next chapter, I will provide a thematic analysis of what can be learned from three and a half centuries of collected wisdom.

Avonmore School Grade 5 - 1957

However, before I end this chapter, I would like to draw to the reader's attention an observable trend in the career patterns of the ten teachers in this study. Becker (1952) has suggested that teachers have very little opportunity for career advancement due to the flat organizational structure of the profession. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the only way 'up' in teaching is 'out' of the classroom and into administration – a choice most teachers are reluctant to make. As the life histories reveal, only Jim and Thor actively pursued administrative careers as a way "up". Although it is true that opportunities for women in educational administration were not widely available in the 50s and 60s, none of the women in my study expressed a strong interest in taking this route. Instead, just as Becker discovered in Chicago, the teachers in my study tended to migrate towards better quality schools with stable environments and less challenging populations. They would then remain at that school or its equivalent for the balance of their careers.

By 1975, the mid-point of their careers or later, nearly all of the University of Alberta trained teachers in this study had ended up teaching in the Greater Edmonton area [See Table 5].

Table 5. Age and Location of the Ten Research Participants in 1975

Teacher	Age	Year	District	School	Grade
Anne	44	1975	Edmonton Public	High Park	4
Peggy	46	1975	Strathcona County	Mills Haven	6
Pauline	47	1975	Westlock S.D.	Westlock Jr. High	7-9
Mary	42	1975	Edmonton Public	High Park	K
Margaret	54	1975	Edmonton Public	High Park	4
Alice	42	1975	Edmonton Public	Richard Secord	5
Jim	59	1975	Edmonton Public	Princeton	Principal
Gerry	45	1975	Edmonton Public	Hazeldean	5
Glenn	49	1975	Edmonton Public	Capilano	6
Thor	41	1975	Edmonton Public	Alex Taylor	6/A.P.

From an historical point of view, it is interesting to note that classrooms changed very little over the half century of teaching represented by this study. As Cuban (1993) has noted, teachers have a limited autonomy to choose what they teach and how they teach. Thus, situationally constrained choice helps to explain both the conservative pedagogy that teachers offered in their classrooms as well as the occasional pedagogical experiment designed to improve instruction.

> **But these changes occurred at the periphery of the classroom. The core of classroom practice in all grades, anchored in the teacher's authority to determine what content to teach and what methods to use, endured as it had since the turn of the century. [p. 204]**

Despite the social, cultural and economic changes that occurred in Alberta as a result of the Second World War, and despite the philosophical shift in provincial educational policy towards Progressivism, teachers continued to practice whole group instruction, rote learning and a heavy reliance on textbooks as the source of knowledge. Walls went back up after a relatively short time in many open area schools and team teaching in elementary schools did not enter mainstream education. In essence, parents and school trustees wanted the children in their community to receive the same type of education that had obviously worked for them.

CHAPTER SEVEN: HOW WE LEARN TO TEACH

We teach who we are. John Gardner

Introduction

Vygotski (1981) believed that individual responses emerge from the collective life. Now that the reader is familiar with the professional lives of the teachers included in this study, I will discuss the process they underwent collectively in their transformation from wary novice to confident professional. As Gudmundsdottir (1998) explains, creating a narrative text is basically a hermeneutic interpretation where the meaning of the parts is a function of the narrative as a whole, and the meaning of the narrative as a whole depends on the meaning of the parts.

> **Any narrative...functions at two levels. The first level comprises the mediated actions that have been carefully selected out of a complex situation and have been "fixed" for inclusion in a narrative. With the second level, the selected episodes become the artifacts with which the narrator (or researcher) creates a story ... in such a way that the reader will gain a new insight and a new understanding of the larger issue behind the particular series of incidents. If there is no larger issue (societal or theoretical) behind the narrative, it is a story best left untold. [p. 4]**

Raymond and Suprenant (1988) believe that the study of a teacher's knowledge "involves considering its successive de-structuring and reconstruction phases" [p. 3] so that we can understand how such knowledge evolved. In this chapter, I have represented that evolution chronologically by dividing their teaching careers into three arbitrary periods – the "early", "middle" and "later" years – and characterized the changes that occurred in their teaching practice by the use of *themes*. In his introduction to *Listening to Old Voices*, Patrick Mullen explains that

> **Themes are part of the patterns of symbolic meaning by which old people 'interpret and evaluate their life experiences and attempt to integrate these experiences to form a self-concept' (Kaufman 1986). When the narratives that make up a life story and the meaningful objects in a person's life are viewed together, certain recurring themes become apparent. [1992, p.3]**

With the help of NU*DIST, I was able to identify a number of themes within the interview and story data. These themes represent the ways in which teachers grow in knowledge as they gain experience both in and out of the classroom. Despite the chronological arrangement, I wish to make it clear that the organization of the themes included in this chapter is not intended to imply the existence of stages or career cycles as presented by Huberman (1993), Ball and Goodson (1985), Casey (1994) and others. As suggested earlier in my review of the literature on teaching careers, attempts to identify specific phases or stages in the lives of teachers are highly problematic.

As Ball and Goodson (ibid.) have pointed out, the ways in which teachers achieve, maintain and develop their professional identity is of vital significance in understanding the actions and commitments of teachers to their work [p. 18]. In this chapter, I present evidence to sustain the idea that a study of the full life history of individual teachers helps us to understand how that professional identity is constructed. The themes that emerged through analysis of the interview and story data support Butt et al.'s (1992) contention that to understand teaching we need to analyze the role played by both personal and professional experience in a teacher's life. It is through an integration of teacher as person and teacher as professional that the individual creates an "architecture of self" (Pinar, 1988). This constructed self, Butt et al. explain, is significantly influenced and shaped by experiences of context and situation.

> **In order to understand the knowledge that teachers possess it is imperative that we know it in the way that the *individual teacher* does...we need to understand how teachers evolve, develop and change their practical knowledge... [and to] regard the teacher as a unique person ...a learner who possesses a special type of knowledge (italics theirs). [1992, p. 57]**

7.1 The Early Years

7.1.1 Theme 1: Management for Survival

Although the use of the term 'survival' here is consistent with Fuller's (1969) conceptualization of the first stage in the professional life of a beginning teacher, it is also an apt description for winter existence in the one-room prairie schoolhouse. Margaret, Mary, Anne and Pauline all began their careers in just such a school and recall with a degree of pride their ability to cope both physically and emotionally with the isolation, the cold and the responsibility. During the interviews, Mary spoke of waking up in her teacherage and discovering that her hair had frozen to the wall. Anne recalls waking one morning to the sounds of "heavy breathing" outside her bedroom window in the teacherage. "When I peeked under the blinds I was relieved to see only a herd of cattle!" [Interview 1]. Margaret remembered severe blizzard and whiteout conditions and worrying whether it was better to send the children home or keep them safe at school. The challenges facing these rookie teachers are well represented by Pauline's first year experience at Gamefield School.

> **I was frightened when I went out there. It was a one room rural school and I think the nearest other teacher was probably five miles away and there was no phone. I had nobody to turn to, and I had questions. I had arrived there sometime in October, and I woke up one morning and it was snowing, and very cold. I had an airtight heater and a cook stove, but there was no wood at the teacherage. There was wood for the school heater but the logs were too long to fit into my stove or my heater. I can remember going out there with my axe, and trying to chop these frozen things in half, and crying with every swing of the axe. [Pauline, Interview 1]**

By contrast, Alice began her teaching in a consolidated elementary school in Bentley, Alberta, and did not have to contend with physical hardship or professional isolation. However, despite the fact that she was in a town school on a staff of sixteen, Alice at times felt very alone in her Grade Four classroom.

> **The first year was tough when I was fighting with my plan book, the teacher's guides and learning the hard way. Like giving excited kids ink bottles and pens on the first day of school and saying 'Boys and girls, you're in Grade 4 now and you're going to write with pens.' So the first thing they did was dip the pen nib into the ink and go 'Flick! Flick! Flick!' all over the place. I thought, 'Oh, no, what have I done?' [Alice, Interview 1]**

Some of teachers' first year memories are a mixture of excitement and trepidation. One of Thor's most vivid recollections is his very first day of teaching.

> **I remember having everything all prepared, my desk, my plans, my notes on the board, and seeing the buses come in. Then the kids came into the school. I lingered in the classroom and all but hid behind my desk, while the kids were peeking in the door to see who this new guy was, and ducking out, and every time I sort of looked up and made a move to walk towards the door, the faces disappeared. [Thor, Interview 1]**

Nearly all of my research participants remembered feeling overwhelmed and underprepared in their first years of teaching. Fessler and Christensen (1993) refer to these years as the "induction stage", a period when the beginning teacher is being socialized into the system and striving for acceptance by students, peers, administrators, and parents. The teachers in my study recalled long hours spent in lesson preparation and the marking of assignments while they struggled to familiarize themselves with the children and their community. In addition, these were the days before photocopiers or mechanical duplicators were available and lesson notes, seatwork and examinations all had to be written out on the classroom blackboards. This was particularly challenging in the multigrade classrooms of Alberta's rural schools, where beginning teachers faced the added responsibility of learning the curriculum for as many as nine grades in one year.

> **In my classroom, I put work for each grade on the blackboard. I would also have hectograph material ready. I had paper charts made because there wasn't time to put everything on the blackboard; some work had to be instant. So you really had to be organized. I also tried to do a lot of other things besides teaching. I was a very high-energy person, and could do with three or four hours of sleep. [Anne, Interview 1]**

The resources may have been slightly better in the city schools but the challenge for the beginning teacher was the same. Here is Alice Halvorsen's description of her second year of teaching in 1955.

> **In Crestwood I taught Grades 3 and 4, and everything was right by the book. It was totally teacher: teacher guide, reader, work book, text in math, tests in math. Like, everything was in its place, and I just did it. Did it matter what the kids were doing? I don't think so. Did it matter how they felt? I don't think so. But it mattered that I was following that guide. [ibid.]**

For those teaching in town and city schools, 'survival' also meant learning to get along with your teaching colleagues as you became 'socialized' into the teaching profession (Lortie, 1975). Thor and Peggy both commented on the importance of "blending in" with the existing school culture until they felt accepted. Hargreaves and Jacka (1995) found that many new teachers quickly abandon their teacher training due to their "frustration and disillusionment as the newly acquired methods fail to mesh with the unchanged realities of schooling awaiting them in their first appointments" [p. 42].

Some researchers have used the term 'critical incidents' to describe those school experiences where teachers gain new insight into how to teach. Newman (1990) characterizes these incidents as "occurrences that let us see with new eyes some aspect of what we do. They make us aware of the beliefs and assumptions that underlie our instructional practices" [p. 17]. The term 'critical incident' may be traced back to the sociologist Anselm Strauss (1959) who maintained that a single key event could change the trajectory of one's career [p. 67]. Here is an example of a 'critical incident' from Jim's first year of teaching.

> **One of the memories I have from my first year is of a boy who came into the office while I was there talking with the principal. The principal said, 'What are you doing here?' And I forget what the kid said, but the next thing the kid was being strapped, and I said to myself, 'My Lord! How did he make that decision?' I couldn't even figure out why the kid was there! But I know he got a couple of wallops for being there. Those are the things that impress you, right? They make you wonder what this is all about, and what you are really doing here. I never forgot that. [Interview 1]**

Lynne Measor (1985) is another researcher who has investigated the use of critical incidents. Measor claims that critical incidents are, fortunately, not a constant occurrence, as coping with such incidents on a regular basis "would be extremely exhausting, probably destructive" [p. 69]. Nevertheless, Measor believes that these events are important because they usually result in a teacher selecting a particular course of action that in turn leads them in a specific direction. She also suggests that these incidents are most likely to occur at 'critical phases' or times of great pressure in a teacher's career [p.71].

Sikes (1985), who also uses the term 'survival' to characterize the early years of teaching, contends that it is almost inevitable that at some time during their first year teachers will experience a critical incident involving student discipline or classroom management.

> **Frequently these incidents take the form of a direct challenge to their authority, and thereby their professional identity. If the teacher keeps control and resolves the situation... it seems that their identity as a competent teacher is strengthened both in the eyes of pupils with whom they are likely to have 'easier' relationships, and of other staff who begin to respect them as fellow professionals. [p. 33]**

Measor concurs, suggesting that these incidents often result from a build up of pressure or tension in the classroom environment. How the teachers deal with their anger is critical to their future role in the school as "proper teachers" [p.

62]. Anne provides a good example of a critical incident involving management in the following story.

> **It was my first year of teaching, the 1953–1954 school term. I had this class of thirty-five Grade 5 and 6 students in Fawcett and at least three of the boys were fifteen or older. Anyway, I was talking to them, and they were not paying attention, and doing things that I had asked them not to do. I remember thinking, 'What am I going to do with these kids? They're going to run me out of the school!' So, I lined up two or three and I strapped them in front of the class. I don't think I hurt them, but boy, that really cleared up the air. They thought I was serious after that. [Anne, Interview 1]**

In his first year of teaching, Jim discovered that just when you think you have the problem solved, the real difficulty begins.

> **I had a rather hard class in my first year. I decided to break up these little cells of kids that were causing problems. So, I went home and I dreamed up how I was going to move all these pupils, recreate a better partnership thing in the classroom. But I made a fatal error. Their desks all had pullout drawers and I thought that they were interchangeable. So, I had each one take the drawer out and put it on top of their desk, so they could move the drawer to their new desk. But the drawers didn't fit. Well, it was chaos! In the end I was rescued by the principal. So, there you have a demonstration, if you like, of how you can be taken advantage of when you don't think it through. (Jim, Interview 1]**

As Ball and Goodson (1985) have indicated, the early days in the classroom contain, for virtually all teachers, periods of stress and moments of interpersonal conflict with pupils that are fundamental in making or breaking a career in teaching. All of the teachers in my study could recall events or incidents that marked a change in the way they dealt with children or classroom situations. Anne, for example, remembers a feeling of panic when she suddenly realized in her first year that she was going to have to keep track of the individual progress of thirty children over nine grade levels and then report this information to the parents. She needed some kind of organizational structure if she was to survive.

> **I had piles of extra work that they could do, but I needed to keep track of how they'd done. So I started making charts like they'd shown us at the university and awarding stars for work done and that really worked for me. I used to have chart upon chart, and the kids loved doing it. They'd even want to put their own star up. The parents were happy when they came in and saw their child's stars. They could see for themselves what was going on. They're either going to say, 'Oh, my child's doing well!', or, 'Well, he**

> **could do better.' So often it wasn't necessary for me to say too much about it. I know they say today you shouldn't use stars and charts, but I couldn't have survived without them. [Anne, Interview # 2]**

Many of the "first years" stories shared by the retired teachers imply a kind of "rite of passage" experience (van Gennep, 1960) from which they emerge with a feeling of more confidence that they can do the job. Some felt this confidence emerge during student teaching. For others, the passage occurred early in their career. Thor remembers it happened while having dinner at the home of several of his students.

> **I recall being invited in my first year as a teacher to this family home for a meal. We were sitting around the table and then the question came up, 'So, how are the boys doing?' So we talked about the boys and I outlined a few problems and the response was 'What can we do to help?' People were basically concerned about their kids, and I remember thinking here they were relying on this twenty year old kid, who had had very little training to be able to tell them how to raise their children. But they were listening to me and I had something to share with them. I was accepted as the teacher. It felt good driving home that night. [Thor, Interview 2]**

For Pauline, Anne and Margaret, one of these rites of passage occurred at the annual Christmas concert, the key social event in the school calendar in most rural communities. Despite following in the footsteps of more experienced and artistically inclined teachers, all three organized successful school concerts which were attended by their own parents and for which they received a great deal of praise and recognition from their school communities. Here is how Pauline remembers her first Christmas concert

> **The Christmas concert was a wonderful time, and an exciting time. The people were there to help in whatever capacity they could. The only thing is I was not musical, and they had had a teacher the year before who was married, and his wife was very musical, and she'd taught the kids dancing, and all this kind of thing, and I couldn't live up to that! I don't think they held it against me, but I used to hear these glowing stories about how wonderful it was when these people were there, so I felt a lot of pressure putting on that first concert. But it went over well and they were quite generous with their praise of my efforts. [Pauline, Interview 2]**

Whether they began teaching in a city classroom or a one-room rural school, at some point the 'student' teacher had to move to the other side of the desk and fully assume the role of teacher. For young teenagers like Pauline and Anne, this was a difficult transition to make, as it meant abandoning, in some cases, a relationship with their natural peer group. As Margaret puts it, "I was surrounded by people who were only a little younger than I and I was expected to teach them, discipline them and fraternize with them. That's quite challenging to someone who celebrated her eighteenth birthday three months before school started" [Interview 2].

For Jim and Glenn, who were already married, had extensive work experience and a university degree, it was a far easier transformation from student to teacher. They had already gone through the survival phase in other work environments and brought with them to teaching both maturity and experience. As Glenn put it, "I'd tried a few jobs before I finally went into the Junior E Program, but it didn't take long for me to realize it was the right decision. I was almost twenty-nine years old when I started teaching and I thought, 'Let's get on with it. Let's get going'" [Interview 2].

According to Sikes et al. (1985), if teachers remain in the profession after the first two years, it is usually because they have begun to experience some sense of control over the work environment and are receiving positive feedback from students, parents, administrators and colleagues. They have a growing confidence in their ability to do the job and are no longer working merely to survive. They are beginning to feel an accepted part of the school community.

7.1.2 Theme 2: Joining the Community

Two of the major themes identified by Greene and Manke (1994) in their study of twelve retired Chicago and Milwaukee area elementary teachers were intrinsic rewards and dedication in the profession of teaching.

> **In most cases seeing themselves as models of the dedication they looked for in their colleagues, the teachers we interviewed had gained rich rewards from their years as teachers. Much of what they found rewarding came from working with, helping, and doing activities with children...They also found rewards in relationships. They enjoyed their contacts, often over the long term, with parents and other teachers... [p. 34]**

Although both dedication to the profession and intrinsic job satisfaction were frequently mentioned by the teachers in my study as well, a more prevalent theme was the importance of *belonging*. During the second interview, most of the teachers in my study spent time discussing their initiation into what Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) have described as the *culture* of teaching. Once they felt they had some degree of control over the student management dimension of teaching and a basic familiarity with the curriculum, my research participants were anxious to explore their role as members of an established and respected profession. Now that they had some idea how to *act* like teachers, they were anxious to *become* members of the fraternity and experience the "rewards of relationships" described by Greene and Manke (ibid.).

This was not an easy task for Anne, Pauline and Margaret, who were professionally isolated in their one-room country schools. Contact with other teachers was limited to the annual division-wide professional day, brief discussions at broad based community events, or the occasional inter-school softball game. Like most one-room schoolteachers, they looked forward to the upgrading opportunities provided by the Faculty of Education Summer Session at the University of Alberta.

Life in the Rural One-Room School in Northern Alberta, 1948.
On the left: Snow removal at Gamefield School. Pauline Hahn is driving the tractor. Right: A teacher and her students from a neighbouring school prepare to leave Gamefield in a tractor drawn Democrat after a friendly inter-school softball game.

By contrast, the teachers in my study who began their careers in town or city multiclassroom schools were already a physical part of an educational community. Not only were they working side by side with other teachers, but they also had ready access to both formal and informal professional development. This was especially true for teachers like Glenn and Jim who began their teaching in Edmonton. The Public Board employed both full and part time consultants to assist the growing number of novice teachers.

However, working in a 'town' or 'city' school had its own set of challenges. Beginning teachers sometimes found it hard to become "socialized" into the school community of teachers, and as new staff members they discovered that there were predetermined codes of acceptable behaviour for the rookie to follow (See Hargreaves, 1994). As Lacey has noted, new teachers who question, reject or attempt to change what is regarded as professional behaviour can experience serious problems in qualifying as a staff member [cited in Sikes et al., 1985, p. 33]. Peggy provided me with the following example:

> **I started my career at a military school. I taught Grade 2 and you know, the first year I was there I thought the principal was God, and the vice-principal was Jesus Christ. Let me tell you, in '52 you really respected the people you worked with. There was a teacher there named Miss H. She had a stiff collar and a bun, and I was quite scared of her actually, even though we were on the same staff. One day she said, 'You know, Peggy, you should wear a brooch or a pair of nice earrings, or something, when you teach because after all, the children have to look at your face 200 days of the year.' [Laughs] I can always remember that, but I had respect for her opinion because she was very, very stern, and somehow that advice coming from a stern person seemed to really be important. [Interview 2]**

Several of my retired teachers mentioned "keeping their head down" and "sticking with the program" as new staff members. Like Peggy, they quickly discovered that school staffs had established hierarchies and the rookie teacher was well advised to proceed slowly until finding his or her place within the school community. This included acceptance by the support staff as well. As Glenn remarked during our second interview, "I soon realized that the secretary and the custodian were just as important as the principal in running the school. As a new teacher, it was a good idea to have them on your side."

Thor, on the other hand, had little difficulty in adjusting to life in his first year of teaching at Rosebriar. He felt very welcome as the new team member.

> **Thor: We spent a lot of time together at Rosebriar. We often dined together potluck style. We played together and worked together. I recall one time just before the Easter holidays when we woke up to a real snowfall. In those days we had to have our registers balanced before we could leave for home and one register just wouldn't balance. By the time we got it balanced and left, the roads were so bad that it took us two and a half hours to go the ten miles from the school to Gwynne, digging our way through the drifts. We were wet and tired, all four of us. But we made it!**
>
> **Ed: It sounds as if you were very close as a staff.**
>
> **Thor: Absolutely! We each did our own preparation and our planning, but it was more like a family than the discrete dividing that occurred through the rest of my career, where everyone had their own space, and you came over on invitation only. At Rosebriar, if your preparation was done, you knocked on the door and spent the evening chatting with some of the others. And you would talk about the day, about the children, about what you were doing, even about your dreams for the future. [Thor, Interview 2]**

Alice Halvorsen likewise enjoyed a supportive collegial environment in her first year of teaching but she also discovered that becoming a member of a school staff could result in moments of frustration and disillusionment.

> **We were putting on some sort of a concert, and my kids decided that their part would have a Wild West theme because we were doing a unit on Alberta history. So they brought little cap guns, and my principal didn't like that. I was just furious because he hadn't told me specifically that we shouldn't let the kids bring guns to school, and I was too green to know that, I suppose, but they were just toy guns. So, they weren't allowed to put on their performance, and after school I waited in the principal's office till about 5:00 expecting him to come back so that we could have it out. Well, he didn't come back. That night I went home and talked it over with my two girl friends, and decided that since I was a new teacher, it probably wasn't a good idea to stand up to the administration. [Alice, Interview 1]**

Alice's "Don't bring your guns to school" story is a good example of what Lacey (1977) referred to as the "principle of strategic compliance", in which an individual complies with a senior decision, but holds private reservations about the wisdom of their judgment [cited in Sikes et al., ibid p. 12].

Peggy also felt pressure to conform in her first year of teaching after she discovered that a "pecking order" existed on the military base school where she was employed.

> **I always remember this one kid named Philip, and we went skating one day and they had a little concession where there were some toy cigarettes, and he bought some. He had this cigarette hanging out of his mouth, and his cap kind of turned over, and he says, 'I'm a very important man. I work for the government.' You see, when you marked the children, it was expected that if these children were sons and daughters of privates, they didn't get as good a mark, supposedly, as somebody who was a captain's son. I found it hard when people told me that; it didn't seem right. It wasn't the principal saying this; it was just sort of the gossip among the teachers as to what was expected. But I never weighted my marks. I wasn't familiar enough with the children's parents to really know who was who anyway. [Interview # 2]**

Although those who began in rural schools did not face some of the staff socialization problems described above until later in their career, becoming a new teacher in a rural community could also be challenging. Pauline, Mary, Anne and Margaret began their teaching in communities very close to where they grew up, and soon discovered that familiarity with both community and rural life style could be a mixed blessing. For example, even though you were now one of the "VIP's" in the neighbourhood, you were still introduced at the church social as the "Wilson's second eldest" or "one of the Jamieson girls." In addition, it was quite common to have younger brothers and sisters of your childhood friends in your classroom, as well as a collection of your own relatives as well. On the other hand, people were always there when you needed them. Unable on a teacher's salary to afford a car, they found that their neighbours were always willing to offer a lift to town for grocery shopping or mail pick up. Meals in a teacherage could be quite lonely, but there were frequent invitations to Sunday dinner after church. Every effort was expended to make the young teacher feel part of the community. Mary, in particular, found this aspect of rural teaching enjoyable.

> **In my early teaching days, I received an invitation to come on the school bus with their children, and spend the night with this particular family. They lived way up in the dunes where the pines are, and it was such a unique experience coming into a little homestead, off the road where you couldn't even see the farmhouse, and sitting in this warm beautiful home, talking about the children. The dad was sitting at the table not being very talkative, drinking his coffee by pouring it from his cup into a saucer, but listening all the same. I remember just sitting there enjoying the solitude and quietness and sharing that time together. I couldn't believe the nice little bedroom I slept in. It wasn't elaborate, but it was designed for special company, and that was the way I felt. [Mary, Interview 1]**

Thor, too, spoke fondly of the supportive community environment, but there were drawbacks to being a young bachelor in a small community.

> **I guess I took the offer to come to Edmonton because while I enjoyed it out at Rosebriar, I also knew that every time I came home after 9:00 the whole community knew that I was coming home after 9:00. I didn't mind that because that's common out in the country. You know what your neighbours are doing. But I wanted some privacy. [Interview 1]**

Pauline enjoyed being involved in the life of a rural community. In fact, she found the move to the town of Rochester difficult at first because of the dramatic change in her role as teacher.

> **Pauline: In the rural school you really felt that you were doing something that was going to make a difference. I mean, you were the only teacher in that community, and you were working with all those kids. You really got to know the children and their families. The people in the community involved me in everything. I mean, if there was a shower, or a wedding, or whatever, there was somebody there to pick me up. I was invited, and often I didn't know who these people were, but I went. A dance, card party, Christmas concert, a movie shown in the school, these events made the school the centre of community activities. And as I was the teacher, I was always at the centre of the activity.**
>
> **Ed: This was expected of you?**
>
> **Pauline: Oh Yes! Most of the major social activities in the community involved the school and it was my school, I was the teacher. That really changed after I moved into town. I was still involved with the school, but it wasn't the same. Each rural school had its own board of trustees, and when they were having any discussions about things that they were going to do, I was expected to be involved. In the ungraded school situations at Gamefield, Blueberry Ridge, and Narrow Lake it seemed that I was at the hub of the community, but in Rochester and Westlock I felt more like just one of the spokes in the wheel. [Pauline, Interview 2]**

As the retired teachers in my study reflected back on the first decade of their career, most of them could recall a sense of growing confidence in their ability to do the job. Although nearly all of them had fond memories of their first class and their earliest teaching experiences, much of their time was spent learning how to teach and how to deal with children, parents and administrators.

7.2 The Middle Years

7.2.1 Theme 3: The Community of the Classroom

By the end of their first decade in the classroom, all of my research participants were teaching in town or city schools. [See Table 3] They now felt accepted as members of the teaching fraternity, were confident in their knowledge of the Alberta school curriculum, and had developed a number of effective management strategies so that classroom discipline was no longer a "survival" concern. The "critical incidents" described earlier in this chapter continued to occur, but the experience gained from them was more likely to result in new pedagogical understandings than in better management or control. Alice's story of Albert illustrates how a teacher can gain sudden insight into the curricular aspects of teaching from one of her students.

> **There were other things, too, that taught me some lessons, and one of them was a little boy named Albert. I remember him as one of my first students that I really, really respected. This was Grade 4. He was a writer, and I thought that this was great because I didn't have to go through all this rigmarole of teaching him sentence structure, or verbs, and nouns and stuff. He just wrote beautifully, *but not good enough*. So, I would go through his work, and of course I would mark it up. And one time after school he and I had this really big fight. He said, 'Why do you mark it up? This is the way I want to say it. And the way you put it doesn't necessarily mean it's better.' That incident remained with me all my life. I didn't stop marking up kids' work, but I was really careful to check back with them on what I did. So, I thank Albert for that. [Alice, Interview 1; Italics mine]**

Alice's story of Albert is a good example of the process Ben-Peretz (1995) refers to as "reframing". She points out that as teachers gain experience in the classroom, they learn to see previous problems in an entirely new perspective. According to Ben-Peretz, learning from experience does not necessarily mean that we continue to act in ways that proved successful in the past or refrain from repeating unsuccessful actions. Reframing allows the teacher to arrive at creative solutions for dealing with the situation and often results in lasting changes in the teacher's practice [p. 138]. Research by Nias (1985) involving 100 primary teachers found that children were a potent influence in shaping and reinforcing teachers' values and actions. Nias felt this was a consequence of the extensive amount of time teachers actually spend with children each day [p. 109]. The following story shared by Pauline is another example of how client-centred the profession of teaching really is and reminds us of the impact children can have on our practice.

> **I have often recalled a little girl who was in Grade 3, and one particular cold morning, I was walking across the school yard to the school, and she came scurrying up to me, and said, 'Mrs. Hahn, I am so sorry, I didn't get my homework done last night.' And I said, 'Oh, what happened?' She said, 'Our house burned down.' And it really struck me, at that point, was I that demanding? It really shook me that the fact that she didn't get her homework done was a catastrophe at a time when she had lost her house. I don't know what that says about me as a teacher. It has stayed with me all these years, and I hope that it affected the way that I interacted with the students, but I think I always felt it was very important that students do what they were required to do. [Interview 2]**

Nelson (1993), in her work on teacher story archetypes, referred to this type of story as reflective; i.e., where the plot "involves a thoughtful consideration of a situation in retrospect for the purpose of evaluating and/ or learning from the experience, and often involves learning from students" [p. 18]. In addition, when these stories are shared with other educators, the learning continues. The retired teachers in the study conducted by Ben-Peretz claimed that sharing their experience with colleagues, or with student teachers, furthered the clarification and consolidation of their professional knowledge [ibid p. 146]. Herzog (1995) also contends that

> **We need to hear stories of teachers who use their communities and the experiences of their students as an integral part of their curriculum. Their stories should be shared, not as prescriptions for lesson plans, but to fire the imaginations of teachers looking for other ways of teaching. [p. 162]**

As a teacher's problem solving ability improves, less time is spent on management concerns and more effort goes into developing a positive relationship with the children in the classroom. This, after all, is the very reason most teachers chose teaching in the first place, and as Ayers (1993), Bogue (1991), and Combs (1979) have indicated, it is why we remain in the profession.

In the case of Gerry Grover, the idea of a classroom community was so important to him that he elected not to pursue a career in administration. Sikes et al. (1985) suggest that some teachers are not interested in promotion because it usually means less time in the classroom actually teaching [p. 46]. Here is Gerry's response when I asked him why he decided not to become a principal.

> **Gerry: One of the reasons I didn't go into administration was that I had enough of administration with being a coordinator and going and helping other teachers. I enjoyed that for almost six years but got really tired of the travelling. I also hated to lose subjects I really liked to teach because I had to be away two days, and in some cases when I came back there were discipline problems. So, I gave that up. Later, in the '70's I started looking, but more and more of the job was paperwork to the extent that in the larger schools the administrators never got to see the kids and that wasn't for me.**
>
> **Ed: What about accepting an assistant principalship in one school as a compromise?**
>
> **Gerry: Let me tell you a story related to that during my first administrative experience. My classroom was right off the office, and in those days the principal's office was where the strapping usually took place, and everything was signed in a book, and you had to have a witness. Well, throughout the day, there would be a knock on the back door of my room, 'Mr. Grover, would you come in here please?' I'd go in and shut the door, and you'd hear this Wham! Wham! Wham! Well, my kids begin to wonder what was going on, and they'd look at me strangely when I came back. So, this went on for a month, and finally in October I went to the principal and I said, 'You know, I don't like this. It's hard to relate to my kids in my room. They think that I'm Mr. Whammer, strapping all these kids. There has to be a better way. What are we doing here? We need to come up with better alternatives.' And so we did, and I never did strap a kid again after that as far as I can remember. [Gerry, Interview 2]**
>
> **Ed: So it was the discipline side of administration that you disliked?**
>
> **Gerry: Not necessarily. I always felt if you had a closeness with the kids, you got things done. You can get more out of the children if they feel part of something. I wanted them to feel that these people they were with were part of their school family. [Interview 2]**

Capilano School, EPSB. Grade 6 1959

Glenn also used the term "school family" during our first interview while explaining why he did not like some aspects of 'platooning' where teachers exchange classes for such subjects as Art, P.E. and Science.

> **Well, my class became my family at school. They were like my kids. They could have been my sons and daughters, all thirty-one of them. But, it was my class. My kids. I understand them, I know them, I can talk to them. We solved our problems within the classroom and we cared for each other just like a real family should. That was what made teaching special for me. Creating that classroom community every year. [Glenn, Interview 2]**

Eight of the ten teachers in my study stressed the importance of creating a community of learners who worked cooperatively with the teacher and each other towards common goals. Classrooms, they reported, worked best when there was a sense of harmony, of common purpose in the teaching day. Here is how Mary describes the idea of working together in a caring, cooperative classroom.

> **What you're like as a person will very much dictate how you will relate to others as a teacher. I felt it was important to always model for the children how I wanted them to treat each other. I tried to help them focus in on how the other person is operating, and feeling, and to be sensitive to those feelings. Parents would ask me, 'How is it that you get on so well with these children?' And I would say, 'They're little people, and this is their home for part of the day.' So, besides setting up a physical environment, I also needed to set up an emotional environment that would be a caring, safe place where every child felt good about himself. [Mary, Interview 3]**

Most of the retired teachers in my study indicated that it took years to develop a level of comfort in their classrooms. They entered the profession heavily influenced by the images of the classrooms of their childhood - as well as the classrooms that surrounded them in their present setting. Alice recalls this stage in her development as a teacher quite clearly. She describes the years before returning to university as very "teacher directed, and locked into the curriculum."

> **So, for example if I had bright or accelerated kids they got this kind of treatment. The average kids got this, and below average kids got that. I didn't think of them as people. I thought of them as a group with a particular ability level. At that point in my career getting through the curriculum was more important than meeting individual needs. [Interview 3]**

It was only after she felt in control of the teaching situation and confident in her ability to diverge from the prescribed curriculum that she became comfortable enough with the children in her classroom to create a more informal learning atmosphere.

> **I liked reading aloud to the kids. I always have. I remember the sun would be coming in through the west windows in the afternoon, and I would be**

> **sitting there holding my book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* for example. And I would read up there and I could feel the children just watching me with their eyes, hanging on every word and it was so thrilling. I know they were not really paying attention to me, they were into the story, but I enjoyed getting them into that story, and I felt really, really good about that. It was a shared moment of enjoyment. [Alice, Interview 2]**

As I have already suggested, each teacher's professional journey is unique and it is therefore difficult to generalize in terms of phases or stages in a teaching career. Nevertheless, each of the teachers in my study reported that they began their careers very concerned about classroom management and curriculum mastery. Several felt it took years until they felt accepted into the school community as a respected professional and comfortable enough with the children to begin to create an informal (or less formal) classroom environment. It is only then that they developed the ability to focus on the individual needs of children.

According to Aoki (1986) every teacher needs to learn to "walk the tightrope"; i.e., fulfill their professional responsibility to teach students the official curriculum while still attending to their individual social, emotional and intellectual needs. The other teachers in my study could readily identify with the challenge facing Aoki's "Miss O." in her Grade 5 classroom.

> **Miss O in-dwells between two horizons - the horizon of the curriculum-as-plan as she understands it and the horizon of the curriculum-as-lived experiences with her pupils. Both of these call upon Miss O and make their claims on her. She is asked to give a hearing to both simultaneously. This is the tensionality within which Miss O inevitably dwells as teacher. And she knows that inevitably the quality of life lived within the tensionality depends much on the quality of the pedagogic being that she is. [p. 3]**

7.2.2 Theme 4: The Confident Professional

As they gained confidence and competence in the classroom, many of the teachers in my study found themselves being identified as leaders in the school community. They had reached a stage in their careers where younger staff members were now coming to them for advice and assistance and they were being increasingly called upon by school, district and even provincial administration to provide educational leadership. They had committed themselves to teaching, and realized that they must continue to learn in order to grow in their profession. Here is how Anne expressed this concept.

> **I think that the more courses I took and the longer I taught, the more I realized there was never a period in your life that you can't learn. You're constantly revamping your ideas, and changing them. Every year brings new challenges. Teaching is something where you never acquire total perfection. It's something you strive for, you work for, you look for, and you may even reach to a degree, but you are never satisfied. [Interview 3]**

Alice was another teacher who identified herself as a "lifelong learner" and came up with the following metaphor to describe her experience

> **I would compare my learning to entering an ocean because there's so much to learn. You enter and the water is a little bit on the cold side, so then you're testing and you find maybe a little warm spot, and you enjoy that, and then you proceed, and pretty soon you're swimming. Not well, but you keep improving, and then before you know it, you can go here, you could go there, you can go anywhere. As deep and as far as the ocean is how much you can learn about teaching. [Alice, Interview 3]**

Huberman (1993) refers to this stage in a teacher's career as *stabilization*. It is a point in their profession where teachers speak of functional autonomy or "emancipation."

> **To stabilize oneself signifies insistence on certain degrees of freedom...on certain prerogatives and self-defined initiatives within one's classroom. Stabilization also relates to pedagogical mastery. During this stage a sense of minimal consolidation is attained. One is less preoccupied with oneself and much more concerned with instructional matters. Gradually, teachers consolidate, then begin to refine a basal repertoire. [p. 6]**

When I asked my research participants to talk about how they constructed the 'basal repertoire' Huberman [ibid.] refers to, they usually responded with stories about specific children or incidents that occurred in the classroom. These were not quite the same as the critical incidents that helped shaped the beginning teacher's practice. They were more like what Carter (1995) refers to as a "well remembered event"

> **A well-remembered event is an incident or episode that a teacher observes or experiences in a school situation and considers, for his or her own reasons, especially salient or memorable. Although significantly smaller in scale than a life history, these events provide a powerful window into teachers' personal understandings. (p. 328)**

In many cases, these well remembered events describe situations where the teacher made the right call based on the information available to them. The action taken by the teacher is frequently based on an earlier incident where a particular solution had proved effective. Glenn told me the following story to illustrate one of his teaching principles which he labeled "Hit them where it hurts."

> **I remember a student I had in Grade 6 at Capilano, an honour student that lived right across from the school. I could see 'Suzie's' house from my classroom, yet she'd be late every morning. She had to go to the office, the secretary had to get up from her desk to give a late slip to her, and I think she did it for attention. Well, this went on in Grade 4, in Grade 5, and it sure as hell wasn't going on in Grade 6! It was the middle of September, and she was still coming in late. Luckily, our first period that year was math so the next morning I gave everyone in the class a clean piece of paper, and I said 'I'm going to give you ten simple Math questions and you just write down the answer.' I gave them real simple stuff and then I said 'We'll correct it a little later.' So, in comes Suzie at 9:15 and we're still doing Math, so I said, 'Well, let's mark the quiz. I'll give you the answers and you can mark your own.' You should have seen her face! She says, 'But I didn't take the test.' I said, 'You get zero.' She was never late again. [Glenn, Interview 2]**

Ben-Peretz (1995) uses a similar term to Carter – remembered stories – and suggests that they demonstrate how teachers "understand themselves as teachers, and how they learn about students and the school culture, with all its messages of power and control" [p. 92]. Ben-Peretz discovered that anecdotes like Glenn's, which she refers to as an "overcoming obstacle" story, were commonly shared in the staff rooms of the schools she visited in Israel, and were usually related for the benefit of the younger teachers present [ibid.]. Her findings are very similar to those of Kainan (1995) who collected "staff room stories" in the same country and found that most of them were intended to present to colleagues "some features of the image of the ideal teacher" [p. 163]. In these stories, the teacher is usually the hero or heroine and therefore "always emerges as victorious" [ibid p. 169]. Mary shared the following story, which I would place in the 'ideal teacher' category.

The Tiny Bell That Tinkled Again

> **I used a little copper tinkling cowbell to play the role of sentry in my Kindergarten. Besides reminding the children to lower the noise level, the bell also spared an emotionally frayed teacher from using her loud voice to gain control of her classroom. The tinkling bell worked magic! Quietness wrought quietness. The children got the message!**

> **Interestingly though, the little bell disappeared from its higher-than-a-kid's reach location. There were no responses to numerous requests for information regarding its whereabouts. But because of a well-established no-fault-finding system in our daily sharing circle, a student teacher and I made an earnest plea for the bell's safe return. The children were assured that no recriminatory action would be taken. We simply expected an honest honorable return.**
>
> **Two weeks went by in silence. No one talked about the bell, not even the fact that we missed its reminders to us about working quietly. Then the day of rejoicing came. The bell was handed to me by a fat little fist with the sincere words, "I want you to have the bell. You like it so much." After a big 'Thank You!' and spontaneous hug the bell was returned immediately to its rightful place. Upon hearing the welcome tinkling message of the bell, the children responded as they had done many times before. It was as though nothing had been interrupted. [Mary Wasylyk]**

As teachers gain more experience in the classroom, the critical incident stories and well remembered events from their earlier years take on the form of scripts or "recipes" (Cohen, 1989) for dealing with classroom situations. These recipes not only serve as guides for their own actions but can be used to assist colleagues as well. As Ben-Peretz explains, " Scripts represent a generalization of past experiences and serve as guides for understanding further experiences, and as a basis for appropriate action" [Ibid p. 63]. They are generally more flexible than remembered events or critical incidents and thus serve a broader function in the problem solving process. Here is an example of script use from Thor's teaching.

> **I recall one time at Goldbar, I knew my students fairly well, and knew what to expect from most of them. I knew this one boy would be up and out of his desk and misbehaving, so when I went into the office to pick up something, I reached over to the intercom and I said, 'Go sit down, so-and-so.' And I flipped it up, and when I came back they were all in their desks, and he said, 'How did you know I was out of my desk?' [Thor, Interview 2]**

The following story shared by Jim also illustrates how a seasoned educator uses previous experience to aid him in making the right decision.

> **There's one instance where a boy was bouncing a ball in the hall, and I remember this quite vividly. The teacher kept him after school, but all she wanted was for him to tell her the rule about bouncing balls. But he refused. Finally, she got frustrated, and came to me and said, 'I don't know what to do with him. All I want him to do is just say that he'd made a mistake, that he wouldn't do it again.' So, I approached him and I started to do a slow burn, too, because of this attitude of his. Finally I went to her and said, 'Well, I really don't know. I think we're going to have to let it go. There's something else going on here.' He was blubbering away, and I was getting nowhere.**

> **Well, sure enough, I found out later from the home school president that he was brutalized at home by his mother, so that some of this crying and carrying on was out of fear of punishment. So, you know, we made the right decision, at that point, in doing nothing at all. [Jim, Interview 3]**

Shulman (1993) believes that an essential feature of teaching is its uncertainty and unpredictability. He therefore feels it is important that in educating teachers we need to move beyond broad principles and propositions and develop a long overdue reinvention of the pedagogy of teacher education.

> **Knowledge of teaching comprises combinations of cases and principles. Future teachers can be guided to develop a repertoire of cases that can help to guide their thinking and reflections on their own teaching. They can then use their experience with cases, their own and those of others, as lenses for thinking about their work in the future. [p. 261]**

Shulman's use of the term "case" is very similar to the concept of "script" in that both serve as a guide for future action based on previous experience. One of the case forms described by Shulman (1986) is the "parable" which contains norms and values which may be useful to teachers as they develop their own unique relationships with the children in their classrooms. Alice related the following story during our third interview, which, I believe, clearly illustrates Shulman's concept of parable.

> **I'll tell you this story but I want you to know that I feel really badly about it. I don't know what the kids were doing this particular day, but they were sure annoying me. They were making a lot of noise, I guess. So, stupidly I said, 'The next one who makes a noise I'm taking down to the principal's office, and I'm going to give him the strap!' Now who should speak up, not even realizing what he was doing, but my really quiet, good, nice kid. He was probably off in his own world somewhere, and then suddenly he made a noise of some kind, *and he was caught and so was I.* I had made that threat. I took him to the office and I said, 'You know, I'm just going to give you a little tap because I said I would. But you really weren't that bad.' So, I gave him a little tap on his hand, and we both marched back into the room. I felt really bad. I was just about crying but it taught me a lesson: never say anything unless you can follow it up. [Alice, Interview 3, italics added]**

As part of the collaborative research process, I asked each of the retired teachers in my study to write down any remembered events or stories that we could then discuss together as part of their life history. Mary contributed the following story, which could also serve as an example of the parable.

"Letting Go"

> **The year was 1976. My Kindergarten classroom was humming with four and five year olds in purposeful activities. I was particularly interested in the Creators' Corner activity centre, where a child worked intently making a card. As I watched, he wrote, "I love you," on his special project. Though I continued to mingle with other children working in centres, I kept one eye on Creators' Corner. Finally, the card was completed; he cleaned up his work area and then proceeded to carry his personal message to his admired one. Jason went right past me and up to Mrs. Rowel, our classroom aide. A momentary confusion and a wee bit of jealousy welled up in me as the much-admired Mrs. Rowel accepted my son Jason's card. As both teacher and mother I learned an enormous lesson that day. As the sting I was feeling subsided, I considered the role of parenthood as it relates to supporting a child's growth towards independence and the need to release him to others. Another great realization came to mind with a force like never before: all of the Kindergarten children left their secure family circles to be entrusted to my care. The parents of each child in my class likely felt at some point what I had felt that day. [Mary Wasylyk]**

As each of the teachers in my study became more confident and more experienced, they found themselves less reliant on teacher manuals or curriculum guides and more inclined to use their own judgment and prior experience to solve the daily problems and challenges of the classroom. Regardless of the terminology we use to describe or categorize the teacher's response to a classroom situation, it is clear from these examples that seasoned educators rely heavily on their previous experience to determine present or future action (See also Schön, 1987).

7.3 The Later Years

7.3.1 Theme 5: Putting it All Together

As I replayed the tapes and read over the transcripts I realized that generally speaking, the interviews followed a rough chronological order. The first interview was largely concerned with pre-teaching history while the second focused on their teaching career and their memories of living and learning with children in the classroom. I had expected that our third interview might focus in part on the closing years of their teaching; but, to my surprise, I found most of the retired teachers were almost reluctant to talk about their last decade in the classroom.

Perhaps both interviewer and interviewee realized that our time together was coming to an end, and we were both anxious to ensure that the life story was as complete as possible. Rather than talk specifically about their final teaching years, the retired teachers tended to reflect on their full career. Several teachers remarked that the process of being interviewed about their careers had caused them to reflect on their lives in teaching and to think about what should be remembered and passed on to those just entering the profession.

I therefore decided to encourage that reflection by asking them several questions related to their feelings about teaching and what they felt they had learned after more than three decades in the classroom. These questions generated some interesting and very reflective responses, which I was able to code into NU*DIST and analyze for common themes or categories. What emerged could be considered a 'handbook' of how to teach. When I had analyzed the data, I was able to extract a number of generalized statements about teaching, which could serve as advice or suggestions for the novice teacher to follow. This was the "wisdom of practice" that I had been seeking throughout the interview process. Here is a summary of their teaching principles or recommendations using sample quotes from the interview data.

1. *Make learning interesting for children.*

> **I always tried to make it more interesting because that was the way that I had learned, by sharing things. I always used to tell my children, in Spelling for example, to look at the word 'believe' and remember it has a 'lie' in it. Remember 'separate' had a 'rat' in it. Learning needs to be fun, so I tried to make a game of it at times. [Peggy, Interview 2]**

> **You have to like this kind of work, and possess the ability to transmit understanding from one person to another. I think any one of us can put down figures and say, memorize them. But I'm talking about the ability to make somebody want to learn. I think you've got to want to do it. You've got to like doing it. I think it would be awfully tough to want to be an engineer and then find yourself as a teacher. [Thor, Interview 3]**

> **Well, I think basically I'm a person who doesn't give up. I've got great determination. I think this is what made me successful. If a student didn't get something, I'd use different approaches, so that student would never be able to say, we haven't tried. In other words, I'd experiment until I found a way that he could learn. I also think one reason I was successful as a teacher is that I accepted students for what they were. I don't think I ever degraded any of them, but always encouraged them [Anne, Interview 3]**

> **When I began teaching Grade 4 full time my focus returned to my ideal of 'learning by doing.' I seemed to be inspired. I could organize the material, I could plan, I could test, and I could report on what we had accomplished. As our facilities improved and materials became more accessible for the students to use, we could emphasize 'themes/ projects.' The students were very involved in the process. Perhaps my last five years at High Park represented my greatest success in modifying curriculum so that the students were inspired and anxious to learn. [Margaret, Interview 3]**

2. *Make learning enjoyable for children.*

> **I think what goes on in the classroom, the attitudes are so important, kids enjoying school, or enjoying certain parts of school. All kids will hate school for a day here and there, but overall they should come to school eager and excited to learn. That's a big part of your job. [Anne, Interview 3]**

> **We always stressed that the kids needed to be committed to whatever they undertook. Our job was to make sure that they enjoyed that commitment. So we didn't have a lot of things going on that were just to keep them busy. It was something that they could learn. I think that's why Gerry [Grover] and I had all these sports programs; because we knew that learning about fair play, and cheering for everybody were important lessons. What I'm probably trying to get at is that my whole philosophy is based on the idea that kids are the important thing at school and we tried to find things that would make school a happy time for each one of them. [Glenn, Interview 2]**

> **I think I could always bring children to enjoyment. I taught quite a lot of music, and I know for some of them I was probably a terrible task master, but I think most of them went along because of my sincerity about it. Joy of learning is something that you can transmit to others. [Jim, interview 2]**

3. *Make the curriculum fit the kids, not the kids fit the curriculum.*

> **As my principal, he taught me all those things, that, you know, it's a kids world in school. It's not an adult world. It's an adult world only in that we're there to guide them. We're not there to push our ideas, or fulfill our needs. We push ideas that will help the students. [Glenn, Interview 2]**

> **This is the neat part about teaching. It's like, you know what the curriculum says, okay, now you accomplish it, and it doesn't really matter how you go about it, just use that theme and build on it. You need to see the curriculum through the eyes of the children. That's part of the excitement of teaching;**

> **being able to translate the curriculum into the skills and abilities that the children can achieve, and every child to his level. [Mary, Interview 2]**

4. *Have realistic goals and expectations about children.*

> **I had a student teacher who had been a nurse and had a rather romantic idea about how sweet these little kids were, and all that sort of thing. It's good to be caring, and so on, for children, but you have to know when the child is maybe pulling the wool over your eyes. Some of the hazards of the job are where a teacher's feelings get a little carried away in terms of the practicalities of day to day living with children who come from various backgrounds and receive varying degrees of care. [Jim, Interview 2]**

> **I think I required the best work that a child can do. I also provided an opportunity for the students to feel safe and supported when they were with me. You really need to know your children and build the kind of trust in you that would allow them to do their best, make mistakes, and learn from them. You want them to feel safe in that sense, knowing that the teacher won't take you apart if you make a mistake. [Thor, Interview 3]**

> **I did not speak one word of English when I went to grade one. Ukrainian is my mother tongue. So, basically I can understand people not learning, and I will go the extra mile with them. I always have. If you're going to be a successful teacher, I really think that you have to have the patience, insight and ability to accept children for what they are, and to evaluate them and see what your goal would be for them. If you haven't got a kid with you, you're not going to teach them anything. A child has to want to learn and has to respect you. [Anne, Interview 2]**

5. *Help create a collegial learning environment at work.*

> **Humour was important. Caring for each other was always a vital thing. Like watching your colleague in the room next door for tightness in the muscles of the neck, and then have the guts to say, 'Are you okay?' It's all too easy to isolate yourself in this profession, but you need to be there for each other. No one at anytime should be afraid to come and talk to you, or each other, whether as a colleague, or as a friend. [Thor, Interview 3]**

> **I was the kind of person who would go to school, and maybe I'd want to know about something, and I would go into the staff room, and I'd say, 'Well, what do you think about that?' Or, 'How could I teach this better?' You see, I knew there were teachers that were an awful lot better than I was, and I respected them for that. I hoped that by associating with them I could learn from them, rather than compete with them. [Peggy, Interview 3]**

> **When you're working with other people, they're always questioning you. You know, you suggest something, and they say well, why? Why should we do it that way? Well, it worked for me in this instance, perhaps we could try it and this is how it went. So, then whenever I had a chance to work on**

somebody's research I did, because always something new would come to me, and then questioning would be occurring. Student teachers were always asking me about why I did it this way, or what should they do when they started working. And, of course, you have to reflect on the past so that you can explain a little bit of what, perhaps, I was doing or what they could be doing. We can all learn from each other. [Alice, Interview 3]

6. *Be flexible in your teaching.*

Well, you don't want to get hung up on certain methods, I tried everything and if it didn't work, I threw it out. Or I'd try it a different way. And I've done that all my life. I'm great for trying things, but I want to see if it works. If it doesn't work, I'd maybe try another approach, and if it still didn't work, it's gone. Don't waste time on what doesn't work for you. [Glenn, Interview 2]

I think you adjust your teaching according to circumstances. When I was introducing the New Math there was an opportunity for the students to get together and talk about it. And so we'd discuss the concept, and they would be given some questions to do, and then they would move their desk together and work together. And it worked for that math, but it didn't work as well in the later years. I found that the students were taking advantage of it, so you have to change. [Pauline, Interview 2]

7. *Involve parents in their children's education.*

You get a lot by asking, you really do. I always invited parents into the classroom, because if you just say, 'Will you come in some day?' They'll never come unless you make a telephone call and make an appointment with them. We always had wonderful human resources in the kindergarten by simply asking, and saying, 'We need you to be able to share what you have, what you can give of yourself to the children' [Mary, Interview 2].

We involved a great number of parents, and right through my school career I can see parents there. I meet those parents to this day, you know, you got to know them very well because they volunteered often They were in the school two or three days a week. That was a big help. You'd give them jobs to do. It was nice to have someone to help set up art projects, or to hear someone read or work one on one with a child. They also had a first hand opportunity to see how children learn. [Gerry, Interview 3]

8. *Be fair and equitable in your treatment of children.*

I never considered, for some reason, that a person could be a teacher and a pal of a student. It used to bother me when I would see teachers who were pals with students. I'm not saying that you weren't friendly, but I can remember one particular teacher where certain children were her specials, and they would hang on the waist, and hang on to her arms, and that kind of thing, whereas other children were sort of left out of the picture. I always

felt a need to treat them all alike, I guess, to be fair. And this was almost a compulsion with me. [Pauline, Interview 2]

Some students just have a way of coming out and they're so agreeable about everything. But you have to be careful you don't play favourites. You have to bring out some of the other ones. They need to have their day, their chance to be special. A good teacher has to think about this. How can I get them involved? [Gerry, Interview 2]

9. *Don't be afraid to have fun with the children.*

Every once in a while you'd get a little bit of devilment. I remember these two little guys who were sitting back here one day, and I was teaching up here, and I knew something was going on. I just had to burst out laughing because this little imp was tying the other guy's shoes onto the leg of the desk. He had them all tied up, and the other fellow wasn't aware of what was going on! They could do that kind of thing because they were so close to each other. So, we all had a little laugh, and I said, 'It's time to untie him now before he trips.' And that was the end of that. [Pauline, Interview 3]

I remember one Hallowe'en, I had Grade 5 and 6, and some of the Grade 6 boys went into school, and threw ink all over the floors. So, I found out who the kids were, and with the parent's consent they had to wash the floor. So, I'm busy carrying the water and they were busy scrubbing. It was so funny to see them washing the floor on their knees. You can imagine that I was just a young teacher, I was this lord and master making these little guys just slave away. I would go into the cloakroom and laugh, and finally they were all laughing. But they finished the floor. [Anne, Interview 1]

10. Learn from your own experience and from those around you.

It's really a matter of, well, sometimes something works, so then you have to remember that so that you do that again. And if something doesn't work, so then you remember that, too. I did more, and more, and more of that reflection in the third segment of my teaching career. [Alice, Interview 3]

There's no doubt that in this job you learn to do things through experience. It doesn't matter whether it's canoeing on the lake with kids or an art project that looks good in the book but for you it flops. Make a mental note of what works or what doesn't. Better yet, write it down! [Gerry, Interview 3]

You never seem to run out of opportunities to make mistakes in this profession, but like the saying goes, you have to learn from them. I learned a lot just from listening to what others were saying in the staff room. I was never ashamed to steal a good idea from anyone. It's the kids who benefit in the long run. [Peggy, Interview 2]

11. *Let the children know there's someone in charge that cares about them.*

> **I think you have to help a person who's beginning teaching realize that children have to know that there's a line that they can't cross with you. I think there's a personality factor that indicates you are in charge, and they have to know that you're in charge. So, you have to be persistent. If you say that you're going to do a thing, you have to do it. I think you have to be sincere, and creative, and enthusiastic, so that these things will rub off on kids, and get the message across. [Jim, Interview 3]**

> **The love of children is one thing. If you don't like children you're in the wrong world. You have to understand children, and of course to do that a lot of times it comes down to listening. And my idea always has been to look them in the eye and listen to them. They tell you things and then you've got them coming back to you at all times. If you kind of put them off and say you don't have time for them, they won't be back. Time at school is theirs. You cannot be thinking of anything else. I mean, you can't be thinking what you're going to do on the weekend. [Gerry, Interview 3]**

> **It seems to me that it would be a great responsibility today to care for the students in these times when we're so concerned about profit and only profit. I think there is still a place in this world for a "caring" teacher and I believe that's what I heard when I went to that rally which the teachers held at the legislative grounds. I don't think the "care" taker's story is out of line. [Margaret, Interview 2]**

The eleven themes or teaching principles listed above were each raised by three or more of the teachers in my study. Although other themes were identified (e.g., Gerry's recommendation to "change schools every five years" and Peggy's advice to "never teach in the school attended by your children"), they were not introduced or supported by other research participants.

As I read over the eleven themes and exemplars, it seemed that what the teachers in my study were really saying was that to be a good teacher, you need to a) be caring and considerate of the children you teach and b) be creative and knowledgeable about the curriculum you offer. Although this is no doubt an over-simplification of the eleven principles, I was struck by its similarity to the results of a study completed by Barbara Carson in 1996. Carson collected responses from 222 Rollins College alumni on what they regarded as the outstanding qualities of their teachers.

> **Based on the emphatic clustering of themes in the responses to my letter, I'd say in this way what we've known for a long time: 1) Outstanding**

> **teachers love the subjects they teach; 2) they respect and like their students; 3) they are committed to and skilled at connecting the two things they care deeply about - their subject matter and their students. [p.12]**

The "how to" advice offered to both potential and practising colleagues by the teachers in my study reveal what Noddings (1992) referred to as the "moral" voice of teaching. Their comments suggest a child centred curriculum and teacher facilitated classroom with major emphasis on the affective domain. This is in sharp contrast to the survival years where Junior E and Standard S trained teachers stuck closely to the prescribed curriculum and ran a tight ship in terms of classroom management. As Alice Halvorsen puts it

> **They were certainly sheep in my first years of teaching. The teacher was in charge, and that was it, the boss. Later, I saw them more as individuals, and I reacted to their needs. By the time I got to Satoo, certainly I was not the be all and end all of being a teacher. The children weren't in charge, but they could lead. In the third part of my teaching career I was prepared to some extent to follow their lead. I think that's about the only way I could teach now. It requires a lot of confidence. And I had it. I knew the curriculum. I knew what was required. I knew that if I couldn't cover whatever it is that we should be doing now, I'd get it later. [Interview 3]**

As Art Combs once told me, "When you let go of the curriculum, the child emerges." What these teachers have learned – some earlier than others – is that you should never lose sight of the individual child and the challenges learning presents for him or her.

> **I recall one little boy who really struggled with the math in Grade 6. He was having trouble with a concept, and we worked and worked at it to the point where he was weeping, he was working so hard. And after he finally got it, he put his arms around me and says, 'Oh, that's hard work!' But what's important here is that he knew it was safe to try. [Thor, Interview 3]**

7.3.2 Theme Six: Letting Go

Researchers who have investigated the life cycles and career patterns of teachers suggest that the "looking back" process is a common occurrence as the individual enters or approaches retirement. Peterson (1978) discovered that during this period an individual "reassesses his or her life and judges it fulfilled and successful or unfulfilled and a failure, though most people are able to find some degree of satisfaction with the life they have lived" [p. 57]. During what

Huberman (1993) has described as the "disengagement phase" of their career, teachers also have a tendency to become "progressively more detached, without bitterness, from professional investments, in order to devote more time to oneself and interests outside the workplace" [p.247].

Perhaps another reason for the reluctance to talk about the closing years of their careers is that some of the memories associated with this time are not positive ones. Several of the retired teachers involved in my study reported that the last decade or so of teaching was a "challenging" time in their career. They talked about how hard it was to keep up with curricular changes, cope with the special needs children integrated into their classroom, and deal with the new emphasis being placed on assessment and teacher accountability. There were also pressures from outside the classroom, including family and personal health considerations, which made it difficult to stay focused on the job. Peggy, for example, talked about the stress of "keeping up with the younger teachers – let alone the kids." [Interview 3]

During the final interview, I asked each teacher why he or she had decided to retire. Most of the responses were consistent with other studies (see Peterson, 1978; Sikes et al., 1985; Myklebust, 1998; Greene and Manke 1994) which included the following explanations.

- **Spouse had already retired**
- **Running out of energy**
- **Poor health**
- **Involved in another enterprise**
- **Wanted time to enjoy retirement while health was still good**
- **Desire to travel**
- **More time with my family**
- **Job had changed too much**
- **Took advantage of an Early Retirement Incentive Plan**
- **Job was becoming too stressful**

Although the above reasons were offered by many of the teachers in my study, a number of them indicated that they had retired earlier than planned or desired. When questioned further, they offered a variety of explanations that seemed to have little to do with the disengagement process discussed by Huberman (1989a) or Fessler and Christensen (1993). Here are some of the reasons given by the teachers in my study for leaving *before* they were ready.

> **You know, teaching is funny in that you get older but the children don't. Like the characters in comic strips. And I was always very involved with the children. I had to run as fast if not faster than my Grade 6's. If I couldn't keep up to them on the soccer field, it was a problem. [Gerry, Interview 3]**
>
> **My experience, prior to being assigned to Norwood, searching for a school principal who wanted me on staff had been a very trying, frustrating experience and I did not wish to endure the process another time. I therefore decided to take early retirement. It was not very smart financially but for my mental health it was a wonderful idea! [Margaret, Interview 3]**
>
> **Well, we'd done our budget, and in order to keep decent numbers within the class, many of the supports that I had as a principal had to go, and some of the supports of the teachers had to go. And the final one was the superintendent was leaving, a superintendent who I knew. There were some rumours of others who could possibly be the superintendent that I did not like the sounds of, and so I said, well, this looks like a good time for me to go. I'd wanted that 40th year, but the 39 is fine. [Thor, Interview 3]**
>
> **We had a change in our administration. A new principal came in, and his word was the law, and he said, 'Maybe you better teach Grade 6 math'. Well, that definitely wasn't my field. I wasn't happy doing that, so I said, 'Why don't you just allow me to do my language arts, and resource, and kindergarten instead of saying, you've got to go there, and we're going to bring in a new teacher?' He said, 'You don't like it, move out.' He lasted one year, and not even to the end of the term. Shortly after that, the School Board instituted their first retirement incentive program, and even though I totally enjoyed teaching, I took the retirement package. [Mary, Interview 2]**
>
> **I actually think I would have, or could have taught for a few more years longer, but the reason I retired, Ed, was at that time there was a lot of pressure for 55 year olds to take the retirement because there were so many young people unemployed. I felt, in all fairness to the young people, I probably should retire. I talked to one of my friends who had taught early in her life, and then took years off to be a mother, and then came back and she said, 'Oh, Peggy, they weren't nice to me sometimes. They said things like, 'How come you're still teaching?' So, although I'm happy I took early retirement, I felt in some ways I didn't have a choice because you were under a lot of pressure to retire. [Peggy, Interview 3]**

Although these reasons for *early* retirement have elements in common with the earlier cited explanations for retirement *per se* (e.g. stress, health, change, etc.), a careful reading of the five excerpts quoted above reveals that what is really being discussed is a breakdown in the teacher's established support system. This is an issue that has already been raised by Casey (1992, 1993), Newman (1979), and Kompf (1991). As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, a close positive relationship with children is critical to a teacher's sense of well being and accomplishment (Bogue, 1991; Freedman, 1990; Ayers, 1989). Gerry talks about the increasing age differential and his difficulty in "keeping up" with the children (see Sikes et al., 1985). Mary explains how the increased expectations placed on her as a teacher interfered with her ability to meet the individual needs of her students and in creating that caring supportive environment she felt was the key to her success as a teacher. Thor and Margaret, on the other hand, indicate that their decision to retire was based at least in part on the perceived lack of support from administration. Margaret and Mary felt valued and respected by their previous administrators and needed that support to continue within the Edmonton Public system. As a principal, Thor could see "changes on the horizon" with a new superintendent and budget cuts impeding his efficacy as school leader. The loss of the status quo in combination with various personal reasons tipped the scales in favour of early retirement.

I have also mentioned in this chapter how important it is for the professional educator to feel part of the "community of teachers". Imagine, then, the feelings of Peggy and Pauline, as the very support group they have relied on for decades becomes critical of their decision to remain in the classroom. As Sikes et al. (1985) point out, younger teachers "perceive older teachers as having eased up and, unfortunately, it seems that the knowledge and experience of older teachers is rarely sought and made use of" [p. 54]. "Getting out to make room for younger teachers" as Gerry put it, was certainly not the "noble reason" for retirement that either he or Pauline had anticipated.

Clearly, a significant number of the teachers included in my study left the profession before they were entirely ready to do so. This can be problematic for teachers who, as Ralph (1994) indicates, are "keen in generating a sense of a life well lived by having contributed something worthwhile to their profession " [p. 64]. As the reader will observe In the next chapter, the desire and effort of the teachers in my study to bring satisfactory closure to their professional lives continues well into retirement.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE 'AFTERLIFE' OF TEACHING

Memory plus distance equals true autobiography.

Samuel Freedman: ***Small Victories***

In this chapter, the reader will have a final opportunity to examine the individual life histories of the teachers in my study as I summarize their activities following retirement. It is also an opportunity to present their reflections on their career as a whole, particularly in terms of their respective educational philosophies and the refinement of what Shulman (1987) refers to as their pedagogical content knowledge.

At our first meeting, I had explained to each of the teachers that I was interested in giving a voice to the 'typical' elementary classroom teacher - as opposed to those educational luminaries whose names end up in the history books. I reminded them of my intentions during the final interview, encouraging them to offer any advice to new teachers, contribute suggestions for improving teacher training at the university, or to simply share any remaining stories that they felt should be included in their life histories. Most of them took the opportunity to do all three.

Prior to the third interview, I spent time with each retired teacher looking at old reports, pictures, and other mementos from their teaching career. The intent was to take each of them through a process Myerhoff (1980) calls "re-membering".

> **Re-membering refers to the reaggregation of members, the figures who belong to one's life story, as well as to one's own prior selves... It is a purposive unification, quite different from the passive, fragmentary flickerings of images and feelings that accompany other activities in the normal flow of consciousness. The focused unification provided by Re-membering is requisite to sense and ordering. A life is given shape that extends back into the past and forward into the future. [p. 111]**

Myerhoff believes it is important to allow a generational cohort like the retired teachers in my study to become active participants in their own history and provide their own definitions of themselves and explanations of their destiny. "They are then" she concludes, "knowing actors in a historical drama they script, rather than subjects in someone else's study" [p. 100].

Before conducting the final interview with each retired teacher, I reviewed carefully their comments made during interviews one and two, as well as the excerpts coded in NU*DIST under "Philosophy" or "Reflection". I had discovered during the piloting phase of my research that asking retirees the question "What is your educational philosophy?" had produced either confusion or fragmentary responses in most cases, and embarrassment in at least one. I was not certain whether the problem lay in the ambiguity of the question or whether it was one that the individual teachers had never before been asked. The latter conclusion seems unlikely, given that a question on educational philosophy is almost *de rigger* in a teacher employment interview. In any case, I decided to use a less direct approach to generate response to this important research query by asking one or more of the following questions during the third interview.

- **Would you choose teaching as a career today?**
- **Would you recommend teaching as a career to one of your children?**
- **What advice would you give to a beginning teacher today?**
- **What was your secret to a successful career in teaching?**

These questions appeared to assist the process of "re-membering" - not only in the sense of the life story unification that Myerhoff refers to, but also in terms of helping the teachers to synthesize their personal and professional experience into an "architecture of self" [Pinar, 1986]. I hasten to add here that the professional images of the retired teachers represented by these "final" self-portraits should be regarded as neither final nor static. As Mullen has reminded us, we can observe in each elderly person a core identity, but "its development is dynamic and continues to be dynamic throughout old age. Reinterpretation takes place as part of the process of the continuity of identity" [p. 18].

Here then is the final chapter in the life histories of the ten retired teachers included in my study. Perhaps "final" is not the appropriate word to use here, for as the reader will soon discover, these retired teachers are as busy as ever.

8.1 Alice Halvorsen: The Art and Science of Teaching

Alice's commitment to helping students and teachers continues to this day. Like most of the retired teachers included in this study, she continues to be very involved in education. Alice has developed a number of novel study units to be used in the classroom, and makes these available for a nominal charge to practising teachers. She regularly volunteers in her granddaughter's school, and is an active member of both the Edmonton and the Alberta Retired Teacher Associations. Alice has also held a number of executive positions in Delta Kappa Gamma, an honour society of women educators, and has just completed a book entitled *Our Canadian Heritage*, which chronicles the history of this organization.

A central theme in Alice's life history, as I alluded to in Chapter Six, is the need she felt to grow and respond to change over the thirty-five years she spent in the profession. When I asked Alice how she would conceptualize her teaching in our final interview, this was her response:

> **I learned and I'm still learning every step of the way. I'm learning now through my grandchildren. I'm learning because I write. I learn every time I read an educational journal. I've lots and lots of reading left over from attending university, or just articles that fit my interests. Actually, I would really like to be a mentor for university student teachers, but right now it just doesn't fit my schedule. So, I can't get into very much more than I already have. I never say 'no', that's my problem. [Interview 3]**

From there we moved on to talking about why some teachers accepted change while others resisted it. Alice then commented on the characteristics of a good teacher, and her own motivations for being a continuous learner.

> **I think you need persistence in this profession. I'm like a dog looking for a bone, and if I can't find it, I keep looking. If I need to know something, I will find it. I will look for it, and I will search how best to teach something. I had that even as a child. I wanted to know everything. And I had to learn to read because reading was the key to the whole world. I still think that. What else? Well, I'm caring. I cared about my class, both as individuals, and as groups. I wanted the best from them, so I pushed them a lot, if they were possible. But if they weren't, then you have to pat them on the back and say, 'Well, don't worry, maybe tomorrow you'll catch on to what's happening.' [Ibid.]**

Alice then shared a "parable" with me involving a student teacher that is an excellent illustration of what Schön (1983) referred to as a teacher's proficiency at "reflection on-action," or "thinking on one's feet" [p. 54].

> **I must tell you this story. It was hilarious! We were doing a story and I quickly drew a lion on the board because that's what was in the story. And then I noticed that his legs were too short in the back, so I drew a rock where he would be standing with his hind legs on the rock and his front legs down. Well, that just drove [my student teacher] round the bend. She said that was so funny because she said she wouldn't have known what to do. She would have stood there, and the kids would have laughed, 'Ha, ha, ha! The legs are too short!' But I just drew the rock. *I always did whatever was needed to get the thing done.* [Ibid. Italics mine]**

Near the end of our time together, Alice and I had an interesting discussion on the concept of whether there were some individuals who were "born to teach". Her final comment provides an engaging perspective on this age-old question.

> **For those born to teach it's easy to learn both as an art and a science. I've had student teachers who could not learn to teach. They had no art so they couldn't do it as a science. To be born to teach, I think that's sort of the art of it. The science, that's the learning of it. Good teaching depends on the balance between the two. So maybe this is how much art I have, and this is how much science I have. [Indicates with her hands that she has a lot of 'science'] Whereas for other people, it's the opposite. [Interview 3]**

8.2 Thor Lerohl: No Regrets – Except on Pay Days!

Thor, the reader may recall, is the "baby" of the group. At sixty-six, he is still very involved in his profession. Thor serves as a director with the Fulton Child Care Board and, at present, is coordinator of DARTS (District Alumni Resource Team Services), a group of retired teachers and administrators who staff an office in Edmonton five afternoons a week to provide services to their teaching colleagues.

> **We handle everything from visiting dignitaries to Science Fairs. We've been involved with such activities as helping a school with its budget, making a presentation on schooling or working on a curriculum committee. It keeps me in contact with schools and colleagues and you never know what is going to come up. [Telephone conversation 2000 03 21]**

One of the explanations offered by Thor for his continued professional activity six years after retirement is his need to "stay in touch" with both people and issues related to education.

> **I've always enjoyed the collegial aspects of this job, both as teacher and administrator, and that's why I stay active. I've watched some of my former colleagues literally 'wither on the vine' so to speak, after they retired. They just came to a dead stop and that was that. I intend to continue to stay involved and interested as long as my mental and physical health will allow me. [Follow-up conversation to Interview 3, 1998 08 30].**

As he reflected on his thirty-nine years in the profession, Thor indicated that he was grateful to those "along the way" who had helped him to grow as an educator. He also indicated that growth had occurred for him through both positive and negative experiences.

> **I think being chairman of the junior high PE association, and a few things like that that put me into some beginning steps of leadership. Then along the way, you did your job, and earned the respect of others by doing it well. I don't know that I ever felt that I had this job aced, but I worked at making myself more competent. It's a growing thing that went from year to year. I remember the excitement of opening a brand new school, as well as the terror when they mandated school based management, and you wondered whether or not it was going to work, and how you would do it? I also recall the fallbacks when your assistant starts to undercut you, and the nights that you lay stewing because of this problem. You make big steps back. Then comes the success at the end of the year, the end of May where you get what you've asked for, and the assistant principal gets nothing. Each one of these experiences is an opportunity to grow. [Interview 3]**

Like Alice, Thor stressed the importance of continuing to grow as a teacher. Our discussion on the importance of preparedness in teaching triggered a memory from Thor's early teaching years that he felt illustrated this concept quite well.

> **I had one student at Rosebriar with epilepsy that taught me an important lesson. She would come up to you, or even just ask for help from her desk, and all of a sudden she disappeared in front of you. And it got to be second nature that you just waited for her to come out of it, then you went through it again. She had a few grand mals during the two years she was in my class, and basically all you could do was hold her when she fell so she didn't hurt herself. A very dear, very sweet little girl, and I do not recall any trouble or any teasing that the rest of the kids gave her. But I learned that you had to model correct behaviour for your students, and not overreact, and handle the situation as normally as possible. [Interview 3]**

At one point I asked Thor if he had any regrets on his career choice. I wondered if perhaps he might have chosen the Air Force instead, given his love of flying. The question generated an interesting philosophical response.

> **Did I love flying? Absolutely! Did I like the air cadets, air force idea? Yes. But I remember years ending up at a party with some air force people. And the 'kill 'em' attitude maybe could have been developed in me, but I recall thinking at that time, 'You live a life that I don't want any part of.' I guess at one time I would have classified myself on the political realm fairly far to the right, but as I grew older, and observed and witnessed the needs within society, I have moved to the centre. I see that we have to have a structure in which to work, but we as individuals can affect and change that structure. That was the approach I took both in my work and my life. [Ibid.]**

Thor then went on to talk about the many sacrifices the job entailed, and I asked him if he had any regrets about the time it had taken over the years.

> **Well, I think that without the active support of my wife Marilyne, and our children Ken and Sheryl, there's no way that I could have dedicated the kinds of effort that a person has to do in the roles that I've played, be it as a teacher, as an administrator, or as an ATA activist. Involvement that kept me away from early in the morning to late at night many times. There are moments I regret too, particularly the nights my kids had a Christmas concert the same night as my school. I think that as you get older, you never wish that you could have spent less time with your family. Probably one of the reasons that neither of my children chose to go into education was the amount of time that I put into it. There are times that my daughter will bring it up; she'll say 'Well, Dad, you can go to your grandkids' stuff now because you didn't make it to mine.' [Interview 3]**

As I was unable to find any research involving life history studies with individuals serving as both teachers and administrators, I found it noteworthy that Thor's philosophy in terms of "how to teach" and "how to administer" was quite consistent. Thor perceived his administrative responsibilities as an extension to his teaching role and saw himself as a "leader of teachers. I felt my job was first to facilitate learning, to make the job more comfortable for my staff and then to manage the school, although that was certainly changing in the last decade of my career." [Follow up conversation to member check process, 1999 11 28]

The interview ended with the following career summary by Thor.

> **And I've never, never regretted it - except on pay days many times! I always felt that teaching is the most positive type of profession a person can be in because you're always providing an opportunity for someone to grow, and most of the time in the most healthy of atmospheres. [Ibid.]**

8.3 Mary Wasylyk: A Labour of Love

Mary is one of those fortunate individuals whose personal and professional philosophies are well integrated - in her case by the concept of "community". Kaufman (1986) maintains that " A person selects events from his or her past to structure and restructure his or her identity" [p.149]. As I suggested in Chapter Five, Mary succeeded in creating the feeling of a close knit community in her classroom that she had felt as a child growing up in Thorhild. Mary makes these connections for herself in the following response to a question concerning her personal philosophy.

> **I must say that my educational philosophy is probably an aggregate of my whole life experience. My education was a part of it. My home bringing up was a part of it. My own innateness was a part of it. It's just like a whole total picture. So, anything I did I would get the whole community working on it, and it was so neat because I've always believed the parent was the first and foremost teacher of a child, whether they realize it or not. They're influencing them, they're teaching them, and helping and supporting our classroom activity. So, we needed to all work together in the best interests of the child, and this fit in with my beliefs beautifully. As long as you could work in this manner, it wasn't a lonely kind of job. It was one where you worked in partnership and it was very satisfying. [Interview 2]**

In all of the interviews, Mary frequently stressed the importance of teamwork in meeting the individuals needs of the children under her care. The "team" included parents, colleagues, administration and of course, the children.

> **Teaching is mostly facilitating, because we know what a child needs, and therefore we direct towards that goal in their different activities. It really needs to be a cooperative effort with the child at the centre so that their needs are met, and it takes an effort on the part of everyone who is part of that child's environment. An important part of my philosophy is that the parent is the first and foremost teacher of a child. And although I do the educational part, the schooling part, there's education more broadly, and the two are connected. And if you get this connection between home and school, you've got a good thing going. [Interview 3]**

To Mary, meeting the needs of children "under her care" meant looking after every child in the school, even if it meant bending the rules on occasion. Her story of Lieutenant-Governor Steinhauer's visit to her classroom and his interaction with a student illustrates this concept.

> **Of course, the whole school knew he was coming, and there was a little Grade 4 boy that came to our door at recess, and he was just peering into the room and wanting so much to come in. But the rule at the school was, you're not supposed to go into other classrooms, especially at recess time. But I knew that this was so significant to him 'cause there's Honourable Steinhauer sitting on a little kindergarten chair with this big feather head-dress, and some children on his lap, and this child is anxiously waiting, so I couldn't help but break the rule of the school. I motioned for him to come on in, and he came in, and I thought, 'I'll get forgiveness for this one time.' Anyway, he stood by Honourable Steinhauer, and he said, 'Are you Cree?' And the Governor General said, 'Yes, I am.' And the boy said, 'I am, too.' And it was so beautiful, and it was worth breaking the rule. [Ibid.]**

Not unexpectedly, Mary continues to be very involved in the "people business" since retiring. In addition to her membership in the Alberta Retired Teachers Association and Delta Kappa Gamma, Mary meets informally with a group of fellow retirees every Thursday, mentors a Grade 4 student at her former school, and works each week with a family home schooling their five children. She has also written a children's book entitled *A Stack of Caps* and is working on a second called *Daddy Times.*

Like most of the teachers in my study, Mary regards retirement as a "shifting of gears rather than a slowing down." Here is the closing comment in her personal autobiography.

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> **All in all, I have had the privilege to work purposefully in educating the whole child to the best of my capability. It was a labor of love in which I believed and from which I received much personal fulfillment. I remain very grateful to God for guidance, to the students and their parents, and of course to my caring family. It has been good, very good! My retirement in June 1995 has proven very rewarding. A new phase of my life has begun. And it too, is good, very good! [Mary Wasylyk, *My Life Story*, p. 4]**

8.4 Pauline Hahn: Still Making "Course" Corrections

Despite the fact that she has been retired for fifteen years at the time of this writing, Pauline remains active in education. In addition to writing a local column for the newspaper and volunteering at the one-room demonstration school in her community, Pauline continues to work as a Correspondence Teacher for Alberta Learning. I asked her when she was really going to retire.

> **I don't know, I like what's happening. I'm enjoying the Grade 9 subject matter, I really am. I'm certainly working at trying to give more positive reinforcement to my students in my comments. It's a little more difficult when you're doing it by mail. This year for the first time we've got a chance to actually phone students, and I really like that because it's a much different kind of interaction than what you get by just writing. But I still have to be very careful because I can get wrapped up in marking their work, and trying to tell them what they're doing wrong, you know, rather than saying, 'Here's a place where you did really well.' But, it does give me an opportunity to do some of the things that I think I missed out on doing when I was actually in the classroom. [ibid.]**

Although Pauline's direct contact with students is limited, as an active teacher she still finds herself working on "puzzles of practice" (Russell and Munby, 1992). I was therefore not surprised when our discussion in the final interview about educational philosophy focused on a pedagogical dilemma as old as teaching itself: How can you best make the curriculum fit the child? In the following monologue Pauline answers her own question.

> **Whether you're teaching individual children by correspondence or thirty or more in the classroom, you are faced with the problem of those who don't measure up to the expectations that you set for them. But I think if you lower your expectations there are going to be even fewer. Isn't that true? That has always been my philosophy to some degree. On the other hand, I sometimes looked at kids at the end of the school year, and thought to myself, 'What did I really do for that child?' I'm thinking of this one little girl that I met in the grocery store here not too long ago, and she was cashier, and as happy as a lark. She was always that way. She couldn't learn math to save her life, but I like to think that she had some personal satisfaction in knowing that she did as well as she possibly could. And that's what I feel that every teacher should try to do; help each student to make the very best use of what they have. [Interview 3]**

Pauline was among the most retrospective of all the teachers in my study – perhaps because she is the one still most actively engaged in teaching. She has also maintained regular contact with her former colleagues in Westlock.

> **When we get together we don't necessarily talk about teaching. We've pretty well stayed together, and we basically retired at the same time. Maybe that was another reason I retired when I did because all the these other people were retiring. But somewhere along the line we decided that we would meet for lunch once a week, regardless of whom was there, who was coming. So tomorrow noon I can go to Westlock and I would find four or five people there having lunch. And then we used to get together for pot lucks on a regular basis, and that kind of thing, and it's all former teachers. We don't talk necessarily about teaching itself, it's more about the kids that we taught, and what they've done, and where they are today. [ibid.]**

8.5 Peggy Melmoch: Find Yourself and Then the Students

As I mentioned in Chapter Six, Peggy was one of the teachers who felt pressured to retire before she was ready and as a consequence she continued to substitute teach for ten years, finally "retiring" in 1994 at age 65. I asked her at one point whether she would ever consider going back.

> **Yes, I would. I'd like to patch up all the things I didn't do when I was teaching or maybe approach it from a different angle. I think I would show a bit more interest in the children. I think I'd try and make the child feel good about him or herself, and maybe try to be more understanding of how a child really feels. I would really like to go back for a year, but you see, it's very difficult because you don't want to take the position away from somebody else. I don't know whether I'd even be able to get a job. And if I could, it would probably be in some remote area up north where I'd be afraid to go. So, it's kind of a pipe dream, I guess. [Interview 3]**

Peggy, the reader may recall, was the one who regarded herself as "a work in progress." Peggy indicated on several occasions that she had never felt totally satisfied with the job she had done in the classroom. Like Pauline, Peggy's teaching reports portray a competent, highly respected and caring teacher, somewhat at odds with their self-assessment. Nor did either teacher appear to be speaking with a sense of false modesty; they both genuinely believed they could have done better.

> **I always felt that I didn't have really a lot of talents. Like, a lot of people were very artistic, or very scientific, or things like that. I felt I was good, probably in Language Arts. I never really had a problem with that or with Social Studies, but in the other areas I didn't feel that I was as good as**

> **somebody else. I loved Phys Ed. I did a lot of that. That was sort of down my alley. I had many, positive things said about my teaching, and many parents that were pleased with what I had done. I loved the children, and I loved my work, and that made the difference. I can honestly say, except if I had a really bad class, that I always looked forward to going to work. [Ibid.]**

Peggy also had no hesitation in recommending the profession to others:

> **I would, even after all the trouble with teaching and things, you know, that teaching perceived to have, I would really suggest anyone go into teaching. It's a very satisfying wonderful life, at least I found it to be. *Once I found myself, and once I found the students*, I found it to be a very fulfilling life. And I never minded really going to school. [Interview 3, italics added]**

Although Peggy could not articulate a particular educational philosophy when asked to do so, she offered several belief statements about teaching and children that accomplish the same task

> **I always said to the children 'Let's work together on this. You know some things and I know some things and when we put it together, we both learn something and we're both smarter. Besides that, we're doing it together, which is a lot more fun than doing it alone. [Follow up to Interview 2]**

> **I've always felt that school wide activities were a great thing for children. In all the schools I was in, we tried to make every child feel an important part of the production, and have their parents go away feeling that their child had participated in something that was worthwhile. A lot of children don't get a chance to really perform if they're not in music, or dancing, or something like that outside of school. [Interview 2]**

> **Teaching is really a learning through experience thing, you know. Like, would you be prepared for this? This child puts his hand up, and I said, 'Yes, Ian?' He said, 'Do you drink beer?' I said, 'Well, no, I don't like the taste of it.' That's all I said. When you're attending university, you are so enthralled about all these wonderful things that are going to happen to you and then you get a question like that! How do you prepare for that? [Ibid.]**

Nevertheless, like most of the other teachers in my study, Peggy stressed the importance of being prepared each day for teaching. When you are not prepared she believes, disaster strikes.

> **I had every minute of the day planned, and I really like that. Like, I like to, always liked to have the plan. And you know, it's a funny thing; whenever I went to take children on a field trip, I always had a plan. And one time I didn't do it. I was teaching with this fellow and I said, 'Come on, let's go down to the science centre, let's get our questions ready.' 'Oh, we don't need to,' he said. Well, I'm telling you, it was utter chaos. [Ibid.]**

Peggy, however, chose the following story (or parable) to emphasize the point that sometimes even prepared teachers require a little divine intervention.

> **I must tell you about one thing that happened, though, on this one field trip. I took the children to a lodge for about three days up near Westlock. It was in March, and my science lesson was going to be tracks in the snow from different animals. I had all these sheets prepared and all these activities planned around animal tracks but I didn't have any back-up lesson. I got to the lodge, and I was horrified to see that everything had frozen over. There wasn't a mark on the ground. I went to bed that night and I didn't sleep too well. Well, God must have been on my side because it snowed an inch and a half that night, and I got up in the morning, and we had tracks all over the place! Isn't that awful? [Ibid.]**

Peggy continues to be active in education, volunteering one day a week in schools, serving on the executive of the local Retired Teachers Association and working at the local museum. She has lost none of her energy or her *joie de vivre* and most important of all, she has retained her wonderful sense of humour.

8.6 Glenn Munro: Still Learning, Growing and Teaching

As I mentioned in Chapter Six, Glenn continues to substitute at several Edmonton schools although he officially retired in 1991 after 35 years of service with Edmonton Public.

In our final interview, I asked Glenn what he thought were the important traits for a teacher to possess.

> **I think, first of all, some qualities are innate. I think you inherit the ability to read, and the love of books. Then you tend to take that and use it in life. I think we must be born to teach and it's hidden down there somewhere. To me, great teachers are also teachers that do things for others around the school, that work on projects, do this and that not just for their own classroom but for the good of the entire school. [Interview 2]**

When I asked Glenn to reflect back over his forty-five years in teaching and share some of his accumulated wisdom, he offered the following comment.

> **I believe you have to have a certain kindness as a teacher. You have to be a human being. You can't be aloof, you know, way up here with the students down there. You have to come down to them, and they have to grow up to you. I think another key thing is the attitude of the teacher. Each one of us, as a teacher, in any school, and at any grade level, has to have an attitude that's always positive. [Interview 1]**

Like all of the teachers profiled in this study, Glenn stressed the importance of being prepared. The following response came after a question on whether he was able to find time during the week to reflect on his teaching practice.

> **Yes, I used to look back on my week. I used to spend a little time on Friday after school, and didn't even leave my desk. The kids went and I shut the door, and then I would think about what I was going to do for next week. And I always was a planner. Everything had to be planned. I wanted to know what I was doing. Every unit was planned out. It was adjustable. Maybe it would go longer, or not as long. The curriculum suggested so long for a unit of science, and so on, and then you'd adjust it. I was always planning ahead for things, and everything that I taught I wanted it to be a situation they would use in life. I wasn't a teacher that wanted them to learn things just for the sake of learning it. [Interview 2]**

As these were traits that had already been raised by previously interviewed retired teachers, I shared that information with Glenn and asked him if he could think of something that might not occur to a student or rookie teacher.

> **Well, yes. It's also important to remember that you're on camera wherever and whenever you're in the school. You're also on camera if you live in the district you teach. And it worked great for me. I never had any trouble living in Capilano. I've lived here since 1959, and started to teach in this area in 1965. But I think that you have to have to be aware of your actions both in and outside of school. [Interview 2]**

I also asked him if he felt satisfied with his career in the classroom and if he had any regrets about not going into administration.

> **None at all. The classroom is where I did my best work. Years ago in my teaching I might not have said this, but I feel I was a great teacher. I was a great human person in the classroom. I felt for the children that were having trouble with subjects, and I felt for those that couldn't sit still. I just feel that I put everything into every lesson. I couldn't wait to get to school. I couldn't wait to go back in September. I believe Gerry [Grover] and I were great teachers mainly because we were dedicated to the kids. The kids came first, and we wanted every child in our room to be an honour student, knowing that they wouldn't be, but we wanted them to be their best. [ibid.]**

In addition to his ongoing work as a substitute, Glenn has become very involved working with the various drug and alcohol addiction groups in the Edmonton area. He experienced problems with alcohol in his later years and after successful completion of the AA program in 1995, he now devotes more than thirty hours per week helping out young men having difficulty in this area.

He is determined to help them avoid some of the adversity he faced in his own life, and finds the work tremendously satisfying.

> **It's just like teaching, although it can be at any hour of the night or day, and with one 'student' or a group of thirty. You never know what to expect. Every day brings new challenges. You know, you don't get through life without making mistakes, but some of those mistakes can be beyond our control. My work with these men helps them to regain some of that control. That's what I had to learn to do and someone taught me. Now I'm doing the same thing. As I've said before, it's my own experience that makes me a better teacher, and I continue to learn and grow and teach. [Final Interview]**

Glenn Munro. Final year of teaching, 1990

8.7 Gerald Grover: Still Teaching in My Sleep

Gerry retired from Kildare Elementary in 1988 after 35 years in education. He has, however, continued to stay involved with teaching, and particularly enjoys the time he spends with his grandchildren.

> **I think the thing that I really miss is working with children. My grandchildren always say, 'We're going to go to grandpa's and do crafts.' They're here all the time, asking, 'Well, what crafts are we going to do today?' I also go to ARCH Enterprises, which is a program for the mentally handicapped. I've been going there since I retired. When I started there I had 24 or so handicapped people, aged 18 to 54, and it was just like being back in school. I'm still going there, but I only work with a few. I started up right away going there one day a week because it was just like teaching. [ibid.]**

Like Glenn, much of Gerry's career had involved working in Fine Arts, and at one point I commented on his apparent ability to visually reconstruct in great detail many of his early experiences. Here is his response to that comment, which I believe illustrates Gerry's total commitment to his profession.

> **You know, if you ask me about a certain classroom, I can see that classroom. I can see the bulletin boards, and I'm thinking, 'Hey, that display needs changing, and that one's empty, so we've got to get the children doing something for that over there. I can see them. Those rooms are very familiar to me. As a matter of fact, I still have fond dreams of being in those situations. Usually, I'm trying to get something across to the kids,**

> **and it's not coming through. I thought after I'd been out of it eight years that would end, but it hasn't. And it's not just the last few classes I taught, it's going way back. I still do teaching in my sleep. [ibid.]**

During our last interview, I asked Gerry to reflect back over his time at the university and indicate what he had found most helpful about his training.

> **During my B Ed program, despite the practice teaching I don't feel that I had any real experience about what was going to be actually happening. I think that's something that was missing in our programs in those days. I hate to say that now, but what we read about in university didn't seem to influence me very much back then. Maybe we were just too busy preparing the next day's lesson. I still think that in the courses over at the university, students need to be told where to get the information, be exposed to the curriculum, then sit down and do some reading and planning. You learn to do things through experience. You have to try something. If it doesn't work out, you do it again, or you try something different. [ibid.]**

As a final question, I asked Gerry to try and sum up his philosophy of teaching in a few words that I could pass on to a beginning teacher.

> **Well, bringing it right down to classroom level, a good teacher receives his children in the morning, and keeps them active throughout the day. At the end of the day the children go out happy looking forward to the next day. Of course, while you're doing this you're trying to teach what's in the curriculum for that particular level. If you're doing that, to the best of your ability, you're teaching.**

Gerry paused for a few seconds and then added the following.

> **There are 30 ideas in that classroom, and when you ask a question, 30 little hands shoot up. So then you put them on the spot, and you get them to explain. You go in there and you get the children going. There are so many things you can get them doing, and yet the children will demand more. They'll start asking you questions causing you to delve deeply into something. You'd say, well, let's find out. It really isn't easy. You have to be dedicated. You have to enjoy what you're doing. You have to do a lot of planning. I think if you sit back and worry about it, you're not going to enjoy [teaching] at all. [ibid.]**

Gerry's retirement ceremony at Kildare School 1988

8.8 Margaret Shupe: From Setting Sun to Rising Sun

Margaret's experience in over fourteen schools at every grade makes her well qualified to reflect on the question of how we learn to teach. In our third interview, I asked her to look back over her various teaching experiences and share with me what she had learned.

> **I think that all of my experiences have lessons to teach. I believe that learning should be a very pleasant experience. Much more is accomplished if students are inspired to work together rather than being forced to do what the teacher commands. I also learned that a good teacher must keep careful records which I always found challenging. I also believe that "aura" is a vital part of the teacher. Children really do feel vibrations when we are dealing with them. If the children feel we're pulling for them, then they feel confident and are willing to learn. They feel: if my teacher is for me, who can be against me? [Interview 3]**

Like most of the teachers in my study, retirement from teaching was merely a transition (I am tempted to say "rite of passage") for Margaret to other types of educational endeavours. Here are the final stanzas from Margaret's autobiographical poem *Reminiscing* from which I have previously quoted.

There
were good times
and bad times;Through
smiles and cheers, abuse and tears
But yet there seemed to be something lacking!
Hubby did not seem to love me and I was frustrated.
So! To court I did go after twenty-seven years of marriage.
I sought a divorce - an act which seemed stupid to outsiders.
My health improved tremendously and my career became important.
I found a new school and I got my Bachelor of Education.
Then I travelled and I *travailed* and yes, I even studied.
While work for the church became a second career,
Through all of this I watched my family struggling.
I taught for five years in Edmonton's inner city
Until I finally said, ENOUGH OF THIS!
I'm going to go and teach someplace
Where age is felt to be an asset.
I'll retire and go to Japan.
And so I did.
Oh yes!

After nineteen years with Edmonton Public, Margaret departed for Toronto in May of 1980 for linguistic training and orientation in Toronto prior to leaving for Japan. She taught for three years at Shizuoka Eiwa Jagakuin (Shizuoka English High School) which she felt was a tremendous way to end her teaching career.

> **I do find it ironic, however, that in Japan my seniority and experience was highly valued and respected, the very opposite of what I experienced in my last years in Edmonton. I think it tells us that our system needs to value experience and gifts of its older staff members. [Autobiographical Notes]**

After returning from Japan, Margaret was semi-employed by the United Church of Canada and went all over Alberta and North West Conference looking for people who wanted to serve the church as Overseas Personnel. She also wrote and published a book entitled *My Three Years in the Land of the Rising Sun*, and then went on to take a Master's degree in Theology. At present she is involved with Pastoral Care teaching with the residents of several Extended Care Centers which, she finds at age 79, " is just about right for my energy level today."

At one point in our final interview, I teased her about "inheriting a teacher gene". She thought quite seriously about that and then responded.

Margaret Craig Shupe
July 1998

> **I think maybe the original one was the real teacher. I look at my great - grandmother sitting for her golden wedding anniversary photograph with a book in her hands - just waiting for a chance to expound on something! The rest of us went into teaching for various reasons. Mother saw teaching as freedom from the tyranny of the farm. Certainly, she liked the privileges of teaching, but I firmly believe she was a born teacher. I think perhaps I chose the teaching profession because in that way I could continue to learn. I feel that being a teacher has been a privilege, and I've enjoyed a good life because of it. As a teacher, I have been able to inspire others to seek higher education, so perhaps I too was born to be a teacher. Perhaps my daughter Ellen too, has chosen to become a teacher because that is what she has to do to be 'complete.' [Interview 3]**

8.9 Anne Rasmussen: Finding the Key

Anne continues to be involved in the educational community. She is an active member of the Alberta Retired Teachers Association and an executive member of the Edmonton Retired Teachers Association. Like the other High Park alumni, Mary and Margaret, Anne is very involved with her church, and serves as a volunteer at both Fort Edmonton and her granddaughter's school. Anne's real passion since retiring, however, has been educational travel.

> **I have visited many of the places I dreamed about as a child. I have stood by the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem and walked in the Garden of Gethsemane. In Egypt I went to Cairo and then to the pyramids of Giza. In Greece I saw the Parthenon and the ruins of Corinth. I have been to the Forbidden City in Beijing and walked on the Great Wall. I have also toured Eastern Europe and visited my relatives in the Ukraine. And I'm not done yet! [ibid.]**

By the time Anne retired in 1991 she had devoted thirty-six years of service to the children of Alberta in country, town and city schools. In our last interview I asked her how things had changed over that period of time.

> **Well, my philosophy of teaching definitely changed over the years. To be happy in this profession, you have to change. In my case, I always kept the good, and then put in the modern when it worked. The heart of my philosophy was that if I felt it was necessary to talk it out with the kids, I would state my expectations, and the kids could respond, but if the kid pushed, I quickly let them know who was in charge...Having someone in charge gives children the comfort and security to learn. They need structure to make them comfortable. That's something I realized in my very first year, and I doubt very much whether that will ever change. New teachers need to know that. [Interview 3]**

At the time I approached Anne about participating in my research, she was considering a similar project on her own. Consequently, Anne had already given a lot of thought to her views about teaching and children before the interviews began. Prior to our first interview together in August 1997, I had been reading a number of articles on metaphors in teaching and had just finished a very interesting 1994 paper by Robert Bullough on "Personal History and Teaching Metaphors." Bullough described his work with pre-service teachers at the School of Education at the University of Utah, where he has them write "educationally related life histories" at the beginning of the school term.

> **The life histories are shared and themes identified and discussed. The preservice teachers are then asked to analyze their life histories to identify a personal teaching metaphor(s) that captures the essence of how they think about themselves as teachers [p. 109].**

As I drove over to Anne's house that Thursday afternoon in August, I wonder how well the Bullough's process might work with a retired teacher who had already started to construct her life history. After the transcript from Interview 1 was ready I took it over to Anne's home and we discussed certain parts that related to her educational philosophy and the "how to" of daily practice. We were specifically looking for metaphors Anne had used to describe her teaching. Here are some samples from the transcript of our first interview.

Teacher as life-long learner.

> **I think that the more courses I took, the longer I taught, the more I realized there was never a period in your life that you can't learn. You're constantly revamping your ideas, and changing them. Teaching is something where you never acquire total perfection. It's something you strive for, you work for, and you reach to a degree, but you are never satisfied.**

Teacher as problem solver: Finding the 'key.'

> **It's a lot of problem solving because you have to have a long range goal, short range goals, and you have to acquire them, and you have all these little participants that are going to have to go through these mazes. There is a key to each child's learning, and each one will succeed to a degree if you can unlock the door to his mind. We're all different. With different keys.**

Teacher (and person) as survivor.

> **I'm a survivor. I know that. I will be able, all my life, to cope with whatever the situation is. I'm going to put up with it and I'm not going to be bitter because it doesn't do you any good. If you don't agree with me, that's okay. You can have your opinion, I'm not going to try and change it. I'm not going to cause a commotion just because you don't think like I do.**

We found it relatively easy to identify the metaphors Anne was using, but time consuming as well. This process is very similar to one being utilized by Richard Butt (see Butt and Raymond, 1989) at the University of Lethbridge, and I would have liked to have experimented further with this technique.

My final question to Anne was, "Do you have any advice for someone just entering the profession?"

I think my advice to the beginner is you have to enjoy people. You have to be prepared to accept outcomes that you never expected. You have to revamp your teaching to fit the style of the pupils, or the class, or the day. I think in my latter years, I was very successful because I always carried a bag of tricks; if the lesson wasn't going well, I just ended it. I think that teaching is a wonderful career, and I've really been very blessed that I stood in the right lineup at the beginning of my days. I never dreamed that I would enjoy teaching as much as I did, right from Blue Hills down to High Park, and even my last year I was not looking at time. [ibid.]

Anne's Correspondence Class at Blue Hills – 1958

Blue Hills "Class of 58" Reunion in 1986

8.10 Jim Hunter: The Possibilities of Ideas

Despite his late start in teaching (Jim was 35 when he accepted his first teaching position), he achieved his goal of a successful career in education. He also found time during his years with the district to pursue his interest in the Fine Arts. Jim taught Art or Music whenever his schedule gave him time to do so, and he was very involved with the Edmonton Public Schools Festival for many years.

Jim is by nature a reflective individual. It became apparent during the interview process that he had 'revisited' his stories many times, and that he was still thinking about teaching even after being retired for twenty-one years. At one point I asked him if he still thought about teaching.

> **Jim: I think a lot about teaching in the theoretical sense of the word. Where does the core of experience fit in to psychology? What is the relationship between having lived a certain experience, and what they say in books, if you like, or what a professor says about it? I had gone through some pretty dramatic things by the time I entered teaching, and those experiences had to have an impact on my teaching and dealing with people in general. I think in particular, they impacted on my relationships with children. I would characterize my feeling for children as one of acceptance, you know. I can remember some of these little faces, as I look through the register and look at the class pictures. I think I reacted to the teaching job, as far as pupils were concerned, with a lot of charity.**
>
> **Ed: Can a person be taught how to teach?**
>
> **Jim: I kind of doubt it. You need a personality spark of some kind to be a good teacher. They can be taught to read curriculum guides, I guess, and administer and mark tests. But I don't know if they can be taught how to read kids. You kind of read kids with your heart. [Interview 3]**

Jim then described a number of teachers who lacked this "spark", and then gave the following response to the "what makes a good teacher" question."

> **I told you about the fellow who was going to teach from the top of his head, didn't I? He didn't believe in lesson planning. Well, eventually that's a sure road to disaster. That doesn't mean you can't allow your individuality to show. I think I would be inclined to tell beginners to be themselves. I think you have to let a person who's beginning teaching know that children have to know that there's a line they can't cross, you know. Your personality has to project the message that 'I'm in charge, and everything is okay.' So, I think you have to be consistent. If you say that you're going to do a thing, you have to do it. I also think you have to be sincere, and creative, and enthusiastic, so that these things will rub off on kids [Ibid.]**

We then talked for several minutes about what Jim referred to as "the good, the bad and the indifferent" teachers he had met in his lifetime, including those who had taught him. Jim summed up his beliefs about teaching as follows:

> **I think a teacher is a combination of an actor, a good humour man, and a con man. A lot of that is natural ability. A lot of people that we remember as teachers were extremely dull and pedantic, and probably the worst thing you can say to a person is, 'You're a pedagogue.' You should never find teaching or learning boring. The thing that kept me in was the fact that the day went [snaps fingers] like that. I loved the intellectual challenge of the job, that thoughts have an identity of their own. I liked the possibilities of ideas and the opportunity teaching gave to expand upon them. [ibid..]**

As he approaches his eighty-fourth birthday Jim continues to be very involved with education. He is a volunteer for the MacKay Avenue School Archives two days a week and shows no sign of slowing down. Here is a poem he shared with me at our last interview.

Olden Days Musings

Days tumble down into night
and wakeful and restless I wait
For the welcome day to come again.
Weeks rush into months and then years
And memories are squashed by the weight of time.
Did I really marry and fly a plane and was it fifty years ago?
A daughter now 50? It must be so,
For that is what I remember.
And I am memory.

8.11 Summary and Discussion

The member check component of my research took much longer than planned. Even with email and telephone the biggest problem was not making the necessary corrections but getting back the approved changes. These are busy people! However, once their feedback had been obtained to the draft life histories up to Chapter Eight, I found time with each retired teacher to talk about their current activities so that my thesis would be as current as possible. Gerry had only a few minutes to talk at the door as he and his two granddaughters were in the middle of a craft project. Jim was very excited about and very involved with a research assignment he had just been given by the Edmonton School Archivist investigating the history of Early School Leaving Certificates, so we decided to complete the check over the telephone. Alice had just finished her book and wondered if I was interested in viewing the result. Mary relayed messages by telephone through her husband Gene, as she would not be back from Kelowna for several months after the birth of her latest grandchild. Glenn returned my call at lunch between AA Counselling sessions and Pauline promised either to drop off her corrections at Alberta Learning when she handed in the next bunch of assignments or send them by email. Thor and I did meet for an hour to review the changes and he informed me that he had just completed training in conflict resolution and had accepted an appointment to the Alberta Teachers Association Staff Mediation Panel. This is retirement?

Robert Havighurst (1968) maintains" that the older person who ages optimally is the person who manages to resist the shrinkage of his social world. He maintains the activities of middle age as long as possible, and then finds substitutes for work when he is forced to retire" [p. 161]. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, Havighurst's assertion is thoroughly supported by the lives of the retired teachers in my study. As many of my friends and colleagues have preceded me into retirement, I was not surprised to find that my research participants were extremely busy; however, I had assumed that their lives were filled with 'typical' retirement activities like travel, gardening and grandchildren. What I was not prepared for was the wide range of professional activities that filled their days.

Michael Kompf (1991) contends that "A teacher does not cease to perceive of himself or herself as a teacher because he or she retires from the profession: core constructs developed over a career are not that easily dismantled" [p. 487]. As I read Fessler and Christensen's (1993) explanation of the "career exit" stage of a teacher's professional life as "a time of reflection and satisfaction on a long and rewarding career" [p.138], or Huberman's (1993) term "disengagement" to describe a career phase when teachers become "progressively more detached, without bitterness, from professional investments" [p.12], I had difficulty reconciling these descriptions with the professionally connected lives of my research participants. The activities in which they are involved are not time fillers, but a continuation of their educational careers.

It may be argued that this particular group of teachers "self-selected" for my project precisely because they are still involved with teaching and learning in one form or another, and thus welcomed one more opportunity to discover something about their professional selves. It is my belief, however, that additional research into the lives of retired teachers will demonstrate that a large percentage of those who retire are still engaged in activities closely connected to their former profession. As Peggy commented during out final interview, "It's difficult to shut down that professional part of you after all those years."

According to Kompf, (1991), I should not be surprised. Teachers approaching or past retirement have wide ranges of educational experiences that provide them with rich, fully operational definitions of the essences of teaching [p. 488]. As I listened to the voices of these teachers reflecting on their lives in the classroom, I sensed a need for them to continue to be involved in education.

> **I don't think I was fully aware until after retirement how much the collegiality thing meant to me. Perhaps that is because I was so busy in the daily part of the job. Nowadays I can maintain those professional relationships without the day to day stress of teaching. You know, you learn a few things over the years, and I feel I still have a lot to share. [Thor, Follow up telephone conversation to Interview 3, 1998 10 30]**
>
> **I think my involvement in home schooling has helped me make the transition to retirement. I have families that have kept in touch with me from my teaching days, and they invite me to their family functions, and so I remain in touch with the people that were so dear to me in the educational scene. So, for me, it's all very good. It's not even like total retirement, total removal from what I once enjoyed. [Mary, Interview 3]**

As I illustrated earlier in this chapter, at least two of the retired teachers, Pauline and Peggy, would welcome an opportunity "to do it over." Some, like Mary and Alice, have turned to writing so that they can provide resources for their colleagues and children. Others, like Jim and Thor, have channelled their energy into supporting their colleagues who are still in the field. Still others, Glenn and Pauline for example, continue to teach long after they have "officially" retired.

As I listened to the teachers in my study reflect on their careers, it became evident that overall, they were pleased with their achievements. Although some did not feel as welcome or as appreciated at the end of their teaching as they had hoped, they could still look back over more than three decades in the schools of Alberta and consider the many lives on which they had made an impact.

For teachers in general and retired teachers in particular, this sense of accomplishment is frequently reinforced by what I have identified in my research as "encounter stories." One of the real pleasures of teaching is meeting former students who take the time to express their appreciation of the teacher's efforts on their behalf. The importance of these stories to both practising and retired teachers has been reported by Carson (1996), Greene and Manke (1994) and Ben-Peretz (1995) among others. As Sikes (1985) has indicated,

> **Much of the satisfaction that can be obtained from teaching is in a sense vicarious. It arises from seeing what ex-pupils have made of their lives, and, because few people achieve eminence, fame, notoriety and so on... Even, and perhaps especially, when they retire teachers can continue to meet and hear about how ex-pupils are getting on and thereby get a great deal of satisfaction. All the retired teachers I talked to had a fund of such stories, and they were an important source of pleasure. [p. 57]**

Efron and Joseph (1994) believe that these encounters with former students are also important to teachers because they confirm the images educators have of themselves and their profession.

> **These interviews suggest that many of these teachers would rather wait for their eventual reward—the appreciation from the mature student who later comes to have high regard for the teacher's efforts. Rather than caring about immediate popularity, the interviewees seem to respect their own visions about teaching and find satisfaction when their students ultimately understand their aspirations. For example, they experience deep gratification when students come back to school after several or many years and tell them that now their teacher efforts make sense—that the teachers have been a powerful influence. [p. 96]**

All ten of the retired teachers in my study shared encounter stories with me during the interviews. In addition, Anne and Mary contributed written stories describing about meeting up with former students, and Peggy and Pauline informed me that discussing the activities of former students was a frequent and enjoyable pastime whenever they met with former colleagues.

It is also valuable to the researcher to note the kinds of stories that the teachers chose to remember and share, so that we may gain, as Efron and Joseph have suggested, additional understanding of what teachers feel is important about teaching. A content analysis of the encounter stories using NU*DIST revealed three basic themes or story categories.

8.11.1 "You made a difference" Stories

This was the most common of the three story types, but I believe they are the most valued. Here are some examples provided by three of the teachers. (Note: Pseudonyms have been used for all of the student names.)

> **I know when I meet my students they say these kinds of things to me. 'Lucy' lives up in Slave Lake, and she came to visit me one time, and she said, 'I used to sit there and just wonder how you could do it all. We'd come in the morning and there was all this stuff on the blackboard. 'Anyway', she said, 'I just marveled'. So, yes, students had an idea and sort of appreciated what you did, I guess. [Pauline, Interview 2]**
>
> **I remember seeing one of my former students at the 25th reunion of Mills Haven. 'Hi!, Old Man,' I said. I always called him the old man because whenever we went on these trips together, he always walked with the teachers and helpers. And he said Grade 6 was his best year. I said, 'You know, when I sent you children to junior high, I just felt like I threw you to the wolves. We were such a compact little group, and then I sent you there.' 'Mrs. Melmock', he said, 'I cried for a whole month after I got there. I couldn't get my combination lock to work.' [Peggy, Interview 2]**
>
> **I went to McNally High School all last year, at least half a day, and one day I was doing the showcase outside the library and a young man comes down and he says, 'I just had to come and see who's doing all these bulletin boards, because I knew it had to be Mr. Munro.' And I said, 'How did you know?' He said, 'I recognized all your art work that you used to do, and have us do, so we could put it up on the bulletin boards in Capilano School.' I said, 'I didn't think you guys even looked at it.' He says, 'Oh, yeah, we always looked at it.' [Glenn, Interview 1]**

8.11.2 "Sharing the success" Stories

Teachers enjoy meeting or hearing about former students who have done well in their careers – especially if they chose to become a teacher. Here are three examples of this genre.

> **I was in the hospital and heard a name, Dr So-and-so being paged, and I said, 'Oh, I wonder.' So, I checked through, and sure enough it was someone I taught, and you think, 'Oh, he was going to be a doctor then, and he did.' It's a very nice feeling to see that they have chosen this field, and been a success at it. I like the thought that maybe there is a little piece of me in each of them. I take a lot of pleasure in realizing that is a possibility, and sometimes they even tell you so. [Gerry, Interview 2]**

> **'Judy Smith', who was my Grade 4 student at High Park school has become a rather famous author of books of a certain genre. She loved writing when she was my student and I gave her many opportunities to write. It's such a joy to work with children who are really inspired. Judy's mother has told me often how much I was admired and appreciated by her daughter. [Margaret, Interview 2]**

> **Now here's a good story. 'Dave Jones' was in this class, and he became a principal of a school here in Edmonton. He and I met after many, many years, and he remembered being in my class in Grade 5 and he enjoyed it. So, there's his name and I'm sure I felt just as charitable toward him when he was a pupil as I did when I saw him later, you know, as a young man and as a colleague. It was a good meeting. I always enjoy seeing, meeting Dave, and I'm glad I noticed his name here on the register. That's really great. [Jim, Interview 2]**

8.11.2 "Special Relationships" Stories

Teachers are always pleased when they are able to positively influence the lives of children in situations where others have been less successful. Encountering these children later in life makes them especially proud.

Thor had several such stories from his days at North Edmonton school. This is one of his favourites.

> **I remember 'George' who caused me to leave the social studies class on a few occasions with the door being closed very firmly behind me so I could get control of my own feelings. Because they would frustrate you. They could challenge you. I taught him at North Ed□, and then at Killarney. Lots of times I needed to scold him, but he accepted it. I remember the last time I saw him was on Jasper Ave. This hand hits my shoulder and a voice said, 'And how's my little teacher today?' And this tall man in a Naval uniform looks at me, and there's still the boy inside there. [Thor, Interview 3]**

Sometimes, teachers are surprised to learn in later years that they were a significant factor in a child's life.

> **I had an Indian child in grade 4 one year named "Brenda" who had been put in a foster home, and she had difficulty getting along with anyone. There were times she loved me, and there were times she didn't love me and, unfortunately her little notes included four letter words that kids like to write. But it was interesting because when she got to high school, one day I was on supervision and here comes this big girl with a baby. Apparently "Brenda" had got pregnant and had a baby, and she came to the school, and she took it upon herself to come and see me on the playground, to show off her baby. [Anne, Interview 3]**

Mary's encounter stories included one where a 'special relationship' was created with the parent.

> **I remember this one child who was coming to the resource room to get help with some skill development, and I was with his mother when she actually witnessed her child coming in, in a rambunctious way from recess, and taking hold of a girl and beginning to choke her. The mom was so horrified, she just jumped into the situation. I said to her, 'Joan, just let me handle it. This is my domain.' She said afterwards, 'I didn't realize. I'm in charge at home, but you're in charge here.' And so, we became fast friends, and she calls me all the time, and we have coffee together. Yes, so I remember children in many different ways. [Mary, Interview 3]**

As Sikes (1985) has explained, for older teachers the message in these stories is that being a teacher has been worthwhile. All of the teachers in my study have invested more than thirty years of their lives in a profession they believe has contributed to the betterment of humankind. Kompf (1991) maintains that a life review of these past experiences is an intense and essential part of the aging process [p. 484]. It is also important to note that the tendency to 'tidy up' one's life as it nears its end is consistent with life cycle theory developed by Havighurst (1968), Erikson (1963) and others.

CHAPTER NINE: LOOKING BACK

> *The life of everyman is a diary in which he means to write one story yet writes another; and his humblest hour is when he compares the volume as it is with what he vowed to make it.*
> James Barrie, *The Little Minister* (1891).

Educators are fond of citing Henry Adams (1918) famous quote that "A teacher affects eternity: he can never tell where his influence stops." However, I believe the corollary to that truism is equally important, in that we need to be aware of how much influence those we teach have upon us. The life story of each retried teacher in my study contains a strong sense of community, one that affected not only their relationship with children in the classroom, but also their professional interactions with parents, administrators and teaching colleagues. As Palmer (1997) has written

> **Good teachers weave the fabric that joins them with students and subjects, the heart is the loom on which the threads are tied. The tension is held, the shuttle flies and the fabric is stretched tight. Small wonder then, that teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart and even breaks the heart – and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be [p. 7].**

Technique, according to Palmer, is what teachers use until the real teacher arrives, and as teacher educators, we need to find as many ways as possible for that teacher to show up. What has become clear to me as I conducted my research is that teaching is not about strategies and techniques but about relationships. The stories contained in the life histories that were most significant to me as both a teacher and researcher were stories about a little boy and an Indian Chief, about a teacher caught in a beam of sunlight while sharing a treasured book with students, and about three little girls who looked their principal in the eye, and with wisdom well beyond their years say, "We know, Mr. Hunter, we know."

In this final chapter, I will return to the four research questions raised at the beginning of this thesis, offering some general conclusions and summary discussion. The chapter will conclude with some implications for Teacher Education and for further research in this area.

9.1 Revisiting the Research Questions

9.1.1 Question 1: What do retired teachers consider to be the relative impact of their own schooling experiences, their friends and families, and society in general on how they learned to teach?

Considerable attention was given in this thesis to reviewing the historical events that encompassed the life spans of my research participants. In Chapters Four and Five, I illustrated how major events like the Depression and the Second World War created shortages and surpluses of both materials and personnel, and how political upheaval in Alberta produced educational policy changes that still impact on the classroom today. At an individual level, several of the men and women in my study saw education in general and teaching in particular as a way to escape life on the farm. In addition, events and circumstances occurring in the world around them played an important role in their decisions both to become and remain teachers.

My research also demonstrated how the informants were influenced both positively and negatively by their own teachers as they themselves entered the profession. While Mary decided to emulate her warm and caring Grade One teacher, Jim determined that as a teacher he would avoid the sarcasm and discouraging attitude of his high school principal. It is also interesting to note that at least four of the teachers in my study were profoundly affected by strapping incidents involving either themselves or their classmates in elementary school. Two of the others eschewed corporal punishment after they had become teachers as a result of its indiscriminate use by colleagues and administrators [See also Munro (1987) and Britzman (1986)].

Although only two of the research participants had immediate family members who were teachers, they were all exposed at an early age to the value of a good education. The parental influence on the teachers in my study – mothers in particular – is undeniable. Here is a quick summary based on the discussion in Chapter Five:

- Peggy - having dinner brought to her bedroom so that studying was uninterrupted
- Thor - growing up in a home where both parents had college education
- Gerry - the "Little Professor" attending parent-teacher conferences
- Jim - gaining a life-long appreciation of Fine Arts from his mother
- Anne - listening to a mother who could discuss world affairs in four languages
- Mary - watching her mother value store customers as welcome guests
- Glenn - operating the Saturday School with his mother's quiet encouragement
- Alice - sharing the world of literature with both parents in two languages
- Pauline - listening to her father tell a neighbour that she was going to be a teacher
- Margaret - observing Progressivism directly as a student in her mother's classroom

The finding that parents are a powerful influence in both selecting teaching as a profession and in shaping the teacher is consistent with earlier research by Alexander et al. (1992), Koerner (1992), Knowles (1994), and Steedman (1986). However, one surprising finding was the fact that five of the ten research participants credit a rural school superintendent with playing a major part in their decision to teach. Anne and Thor, for example, were spotted while still in junior high school as potential teachers and were tracked through until graduation and then recruited. The provincially appointed school superintendents in this province were responsible for immense geographical areas and large numbers of teachers. According to Collins (1958) on average, they had authority over 2200 students in eighty classrooms spread out over hundreds of square miles of rural Alberta. Although it is clear from reading their annual reports that these men were responsible for recruiting during teacher shortages, they seem to have taken a personal interest in these young teachers as well (La Fleur, 1977). It is difficult to imagine a senior executive in today's large rural and urban school systems showing the interest in a new teacher that Pauline describes here:

> **Before the superintendent dropped me off at the school, we stopped at two neighbours, and he explained to them that this girl is coming in here to teach and she's coming out of the city and doesn't have anything. She needs bedding, she needs this, she needs that and they lent it to me, and it was just wonderful. Afterwards, he drove all the way out to where my folks lived to let them know that I was okay. [Pauline, Interview # 1]**

These men were not insensitive to the difficulties experienced by the rookie teacher in an isolated setting, and provided a great deal of encouragement and moral support while discharging their duties as an inspector of schools [See Swift, 1986)]. Pauline also shared the following story about an encounter with her superintendent that not only illustrates the gentle and sensitive approach these administrators often adopted with the novice teacher, but also demonstrates how a shared story can be a highly effective method of delivering important information about how to teach.

> **Gosh, he gave me lots of advice. I'll never forget, the second time he was out. We had talked about a lot of things, and then he told me this story about the superintendent who came out to the school, and gave this teacher all these ideas, and she diligently wrote them all down. I think maybe I was writing his advice down when he was talking to me! Anyway, he told me that she wrote all this stuff down, and then he left, and he went outside and suddenly he came back and said, 'Oh, by the way, there's something else I would recommend you do.' She said, 'Oh, just a minute.' She reached down in her waste basket to get her paper and wrote it down. That was the kind of stories he liked to tell. [Pauline, Interview 2]**

Question 2: How do teachers transform their school experience into professional knowledge?

Teachers learn to teach through experience, and retired teachers generally possess more of this valuable commodity than anyone else. What became evident from reconstructing the careers of the ten teachers in this study was that they transformed their school experience into professional knowledge by codifying this information into narrative form. Regardless of the terminology employed, (e.g., "strategic knowledge" – Shulman, 1986; "scripts" – Cohen, 1989; "recalled events" – Carter, 1995; or "frames" - Meyer, 1996) the process remained the same. Each teacher found a way to store his or her experiences in an easily recoverable 'story' form. The particular incident or event was reinforced in memory by sharing the experience with others and by referring to the rule or principle it represents in their daily practice. Thereafter, as Ben-Peretz explains in *Learning From Experience* (1995) "Episodic memory about specific events, based on personal experience, can be transformed into generalized knowledge about the objective reality of the world" [p. 8].

Meyer (1990) reminds us that our knowledge about teaching and children cannot be restricted to the events of the classroom.

> **Making sense of the stories that unfold within our classroom means making sense of who we are, how we think about ourselves, and the many contexts and situations of which we are a part...Framing our stories begins with living our lives and it is our lived experiences that form our frames. We see the world through the glasses of our own experiences. [p. 120]**

Thor offered the following example from his life story to illustrate the multiple frames we inhabit as teachers, and how the experience from one aspect of our lives can impact upon another.

> **Some things about teaching you learn only after you became a parent. I guess I always believed that you had to teach the child rather than the subject, but it became more important after my own family started school. Working with your own children you realize that you can't force everybody into the same little square hole, that some of them needed round holes, and some even needed oblong ones. I learned a lot of this through my own children. I became more patient. I don't think I was less tolerant of sloppy work and sloppy behaviour, but I think I gave children a greater opportunity to experiment, to test, to try something, and probably they were safer in trying it and making a mistake than before I became a parent. [Interview 3]**

Researchers in the area of teachers' professional knowledge face a bewildering array of terms and categories. At the risk of oversimplification, I suggest that teachers learn how to teach by developing a classifying or codifying system which enables them to: a) make sense of their everyday experiences with children, and b) recall past experiences to help guide future actions.

The lives and stories of the teachers in this study reveal how each individual learned to teach by observing, listening, reading, but above all, *experimenting* in the classroom. Alice credits the university courses and professors with having a major influence on her teaching, but also comments on how much she learned by "eavesdropping" on colleagues like Ila Scott in the open area environment of Richard Secord School. Margaret believes her mother was a major influence on her pedagogical style, but she also learned from direct experience the consequences of throwing a boot at an unruly child. Peggy recalls with amusement how intimidated she was by an older staff member, but she remembered her advice about the importance of varying your appearance in front of children and incorporated that advice into her own practice.

Morwenna Griffiths tells us that, " Learning from the stories of others is an excellent way of improving one's own vision and practices" [1995, p. 104]. Indeed, the sharing of a story about our practice increases its value while reinforcing our own knowledge of the rule or event being illustrated. Even if the story or lesson is not shared, I believe we often learn by reflecting on our actions so that we enhance our pedagogical knowledge not just by doing, but by thinking about what we have done, are doing and are going to do. As Frank Smith once reminded me, "Some of the best conversations about teaching that you will ever have will be with yourself."

9.1.3. Question 3: What do retired teachers feel are the characteristics of a good teacher?

As this question was dealt with at some length in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, I would like to present a summary of the opinions offered by the retired teachers at this point (see Table 6). All of the written stories, interview transcripts and other artifacts generated by this study were checked for statements made by the research participants regarding teacher characteristics which they felt were essential if one was to be successful as a teacher. It is important to note that failure to mention a particular characteristic by an informant should not be construed as lack of support or agreement with the statement. It simply indicates that it did not appear in our discussion or in their writings. Unless a particular teacher characteristics was mentioned in writing, in discussion or during the interview by at least five of the research participants, it was not included in the table. However, the characteristics are presented in order of frequency of appearance within the data. In other words, Characteristic 1, "Caring for or loving children" was the one mentioned most frequently by the ten informants.

The data were originally tabulated using NU*DIST, and then cross-checked using keyword Search and Find commands contained in that program and Microsoft Word. The results are surprisingly consistent with a similar survey conducted by Ryans for the American Council on Education in 1960 [p. 365-66].

Table 6. What do Retired Teachers Believe are the Characteristics of a Good Teacher?

Characteristic	AR	AH	MS	MW	PM	PH	JH	GM	GG	TL	#
1.Caring for or. love of children.	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	10
2. Planning and Preparedness	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	10
3. Enthusiasm or positive attitude	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	10
4. Love of subject or learning	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	10
5. Knowledge of curriculum	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	10
6. Sense of Humour	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	10
7.Reflective; learn from mistakes	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	★	10
8. Dedication or "call to teach"	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	✱	10
9. Work "beyond" classroom		✱	✱	✱	✱		✱	✱	✱	✱	8
10. Personality or "presence"	★		★		★	★	★		★	★	7
11. Flexibility	✱	✱		✱	✱			✱	✱	✱	7
12. Theoretical background		★	★	★		★	★	★	★		7
12 Natural Ability; "Born to teach"		✱	✱	✱	✱		✱		✱		6
13. Constructivist Environment		★		★	★			★		★	5
TEACHER	**AR**	**AH**	**MS**	**MW**	**PM**	**PH**	**JH**	**GM**	**GG**	**TL**	

To summarize, an excellent teacher is one who is caring, sensitive, flexible, enthusiastic, expert, personable, dedicated, collegial, reflective, loves learning, has a good sense of humour and is well prepared. Surely that's not too much to ask for in a *beginning* teacher!

As a footnote, what I found particularly interesting with the results presented in Table 6 is the consistency of responses. All ten of the teachers mentioned or implied support for eight of the listed characteristics.

9.1.4 Question 4. How do retired teachers view their lives in retrospect?

In a word, satisfying (although the jury may still be out for some of my informants when considering their final decade). As I mentioned in the introduction to Chapter Eight, studies into teacher life cycle generally reveal that teachers look back on their careers with a feeling of accomplishment and sense of satisfaction. (Fessler and Christensen, 1993; Ben-Peretz, 1995]. However, as McLean, (1992) and Woods (1994) have pointed out, a better answer might be "it depends". As Kompf (1991) explains,

> **Retirement is viewed by many as an event falling somewhere between earned reward and banishment. A retiree facing professional retirement with eagerness (i.e., as a reward) may have had a place in a system of constructs which successfully anticipated the main aspects of retirement. [p. 479]**

The converse, of course is not being ready for such an event. After reading the comments in Chapter Eight extracted from the interviews, I would suggest that several of the teachers in this study were not ready to retire and were left with a lack of closure or feeling of incompleteness after taking advantage of early retirement packages or leaving for various other reasons.

Perhaps a more interesting question to have asked was "Why are they still so busy?" One possible answer is that teaching has been so satisfying that the retirees are reluctant to give it up, and there was some evidence to support that view within the interview data. However, another possible explanation is the one alluded to in the previous paragraph. I realize the inherent danger in generalizing from such a small sample, but if these teachers are in any way typical of the current group of retirees, then perhaps there is a correlation between their desire to remain active in the profession and the pressure they feel from School Boards, District administration and colleagues to take advantage of early retirement incentives.

9.2 Revisiting the Validity Question in Story

As Hobson (1994) has noted, when we listen to teachers looking back, we can detect a sense of affectionate nostalgia in their voices for the days gone by, especially as they make comparisons with their increasingly stark perceptions of contemporary days. It was also very evident during the interview process that some of the retired teachers were more forthright about their life experiences than others. Although I attempted to verify some of the incidents and events by checking artifacts and repeating questions, the researcher into the lives of retired teachers basically must rely on the memory and credibility of the teachers themselves. Butt et al. (1992), in reference to the same dilemma, state that

> **The fallibility of memory, selective recall, repression, the shaping of stories, internal idealization and nostalgia all present the possibility of biased data. The inward-looking nature of autobiography, the making sense of ourselves in our own terms, can be seen as narcissistic and solipsistic, lacking the contrasting 'countersubjective' view of others [p. 91].**

As I discussed briefly in Chapter Three, it is difficult to verify the histories of retired teachers because they are no longer teaching. Ben-Peretz (1995), commenting on the predominance of positive experiences in the life stories of the retired teachers in her study, believed that this was the "Pollyanna principle" at work. She suggested that "pleasant experiences may be more salient to the narrator who tries to share past experiences with others. It may seem more constructive to share success stories than to paint gloomy pictures of the past" [p. 91]. As researchers into life cycles and career patterns have pointed out, there is a distinct tendency to "rosify" our past as we approach the end of our lives (Havighurst, 1968; Casey, 1994).

Mullen (1992) writes that "when an old person tells a story about the past, it is not necessarily an absolutely factual account of the way things were; rather, the story is filtered through the imagination of the teller and influenced by what has happened in the intervening years and by their current situation" [p.3]. There were times during the interviews when it was obvious that my informant was struggling to "get it right." (Fortunately, on several of these occasions, the *raconteur* was rescued from any prevarication by the presence of an infallible spouse, who took pains to relate the 'correct' version of events!)

Portalupi (1995) believes that memory and imagination work hand in hand to forge an interpretive connection between past and present, which has a more compelling claim to accuracy than mere fact. "Because we are story making creatures," she continues, "we are drawn to create scenes that fit the narrative lives we are in the midst of living" [p. 1]. Therefore, our stories may contain both the actual experiences and the "felt-experiences" of our lives. In other words, it should be expected that life history or autobiography will be a mixture of both fact and imagination.

Alexander et al. (1992) claim that "lived experience may contain lies as well as truths" [p. 62]. This is certainly in line with Ayers' (1989) contention that "writing about a life smoothes it out. There is falseness in the writing. But writing about a life also makes it public, and there is validity in making a public record. This is the tension of autobiography: authenticity versus distortion" [p. 126].

I contend that what is important in this form of investigation is not the accuracy of the life history itself but the lessons the stories contain for us about teaching. As Clausen (cited in Kompf, 1991) has noted, "if memories are not always accurate, they are nevertheless real in terms of their consequences for the present [p. 484]. Even the "encounter" stories serve a purpose in that they demonstrate to others how rewarding and satisfying the teaching profession can be. Indeed, the "constructed" story may be more valuable in terms of its applicability or generalizability because it incorporates much more than the original experiences. It is also important to note that the stories are generally being shared for a purpose, and whether that purpose is to entertain or to educate is not as important as the net effect of sharing it in the first place. If I can learn something from the story that informs me about teaching, then verisimilitude assumes lesser importance than epistemology.

9.3 Implications of This Study

9.3.1 For Teaching

Ivor Goodson (1992) believes it is important to search for the relationship "between school life and whole life for in that dialectic crucial tales will be told" [p16]. The stories shared by the teachers in my study remind us that, unlike doctors or lawyers, teachers do not begin training with little or no knowledge about the profession. The reader may recall my earlier description of Anne's first teaching experience at Blue Hill School, and how she had tried to teach the way she had seen her teacher, "Mrs. Cunningham" teach, largely because she "knew of nothing else to do" [Interview 3].

G. K. Chesterson (1909) once remarked that "Tradition…is the democracy of the dead." "The apprenticeship of observation effect described by Lortie (1975) results in many educational practices being continued long after they have outlived their efficacy or utility. As Cuban (1993) has indicated, the knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes that teachers possess shape what they choose to do in their classrooms and explain the core of instructional practices that have endured over time [p.20].

Other researchers have suggested that the personal biographies students bring with them to their teacher training experience not only help to perpetuate outdated teaching practices, but result in a *reaction* to classroom situations rather than a *reflection* on alternative solutions [Goodson, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994]. In other words, in order to survive they resort to negatively oriented coping strategies that "worked" for their own teachers – even to the point of ignoring what they have learned in their university pre-service teacher preparation. Knowles (1992) in particular, has expressed concern that we need to pay much more attention to the student's previous life experiences and beliefs about teaching if we are to provide anything other than a "thin, overlay experience" which is basically "too short, too structured and too insensitive to individual needs and backgrounds" [p. 147]. Otherwise, universities

> **create further discontinuities about teaching for the pre-service teacher, particularly if the negative aspects of previous experiences are not dealt**

> **with. By not dealing with the biography of teachers in preparation, future beginning teachers are bound to become teachers who teach in the manner in which they were taught. [ibid.]**

It is my contention that the work being carried out by Burden (1982) Knowles and Holt-Reynolds (1991), and Butt et al. (1992) in the use of personal biography as a component of preservice training should be considered for program inclusion by all teacher education institutions. By having students share their previous classroom experiences – good, bad and indifferent – we can open discussion on alternative practices while at the same time reinforce important connections between theory and practice.

As part of my research, I was interested in the relative importance the retired teachers in my study placed on various forms of professional development. In the fall of 1998, I completed a telephone survey in which I asked them to rank from 1 to 5 the following variables in terms of its contribution to their knowledge of teaching. Table 7 presents the results of that survey.

Table 7: Rank Order of Five Variables Indicating Their Relative Importance to Professional Growth of Each Retired Teacher After Initial Teacher Training.

*RANK	AR	AH	MS	MW	PM	PH	JH	GM	GG	TL	Mean
Return to University	1	5	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1.8
Classroom Experience	5	4	4	3	5	4	4	4	3	5	4.1
Teaching Colleagues	4	3	5	1	4	5	3	3	4	1	3.3
Self – Initiated Pro D	2	2	2	5	2	3	5	5	5	4	3.5
Mandated Pro D	3	1	3	4	3	2	2	1	2	3	2.4

***Note: 5= Highest, 1= Lowest**

As the mean scores indicate, most of the teachers in my sample felt that the most important variable in developing their teaching ability after their initial training was classroom experience. The only exception to this general conclusion was Alice Halvorsen, who felt that the University had played a major role in transforming her teaching. These results are consistent with other studies that have shown that teachers do not place a high value on the theoretical knowledge presented in their university courses [Alexander et al., 1992; Ball and Goodson, 1985; Goodlad, 1990; Carter, 1990]. However, the reader will recall from the discussion in Chapter Five that nearly all of the teachers who had completed the Junior E or equivalent felt that the program had been very helpful in preparing them for the exigencies of the classroom. Nevertheless, those who stayed on for an additional year of training before teaching were fairly negative about the experience.

This study is certainly not the first to raise the question of why practising teachers give little credit to the university for developing their pedagogical content knowledge. However, Table 7 clearly indicates that District sponsored professional development activities also receive low rankings from the retired teachers. I suggest that what the teachers are indicating in this study is for both universities and school districts to provide greater opportunities for them to share their experiences with colleagues and discuss the puzzles of practice which they confront on a daily basis.

Marble (1997) argues that preservice training places too much concern on the technical aspects of teaching, noting that learning to teach through practice alone tends to value replication of modeled actions and does not introduce teachers to reflective practice.

> **Student teachers feel and interpret these tensions as the classic struggle between theory and practice. The challenge for teacher educators though, should not be so much on how to avoid an excess technical focus, but how to synthesize the technical and intellectual perspectives into a thoughtful understanding of classroom practice [p. 56].**

I believe that the results of my study support the call from a number of researchers for greater emphasis to be placed on the role played by our autobiography in shaping our teaching practice. As Woods (1984) has stated

> **Our data have suggested how the formulation of self in the early years may relate to later teaching and handling of a subject area, and the part played in the formulation of that self by such factors as home environment, parents, teachers, marriage and socio-economic factors. We need to give more consideration to this whole life perspective... If we are to do the study of the curriculum—and the people involved in it—full justice [p. 248].**

As I have noted in my observations on the importance of personal as well as professional experiences in the shaping of teaching, our biographies continue to play an important role in this regard throughout our careers. By studying the lives of teachers during their preservice training, future educators will come to understand how direct experience and theory both play a part in our evolving practice. Future teachers must appreciate that there is a need to strike a balance between conceptual knowledge or *episteme* and perceptual knowledge or *phronesis*. As Kessels and Korthagen (1996) maintain,

> **We do not want our student teachers to be collectors of knowledge on teaching. We want them to become good teachers. And there is another pitfall connected to this one. It is the idea that the expert's knowledge can be severed from him or her, abstracted from the person, put on a blackboard in front of students or written in a paper in a purely conceptual form, creating the impression that an insight is the same thing as the sentences to be read. We can assure you; it is not the same. [p. 21-22]**

Finally, I would like to mention the potential of "Grey Power" for consideration. Although many universities, including my own, have developed programs which utilize retired teachers in both mentorship and supportive roles, it is my belief that the potential of former teachers has been largely ignored. As Ralph (1994) has reported

> **Veteran educators are not only readily able to discern strengths and weaknesses in teacher preparation programs, but they are also capable of offering sensible recommendations to help rectify the problem...Senior educators, like their counterparts from other professions, have reached a stage in their careers and lives in which they have mastered their respective crafts and have refined their skills. As a group, they represent a rich resource for the teaching profession that is currently underused [p. 70]**

If it is true that teachers at present are retiring from the profession before they are ready, then an opportunity presents itself to utilize Grey Power to not only assist the beginning teacher, but provide a more satisfactory "phasing out" process for individuals who have devoted their lives to educating children. The cost of such an undertaking may prove to be less than the proverbial "golden handshake" and the benefits to the retiring individual are incalculable. [See Sacks and Wilcox, 1988].

9.3.2 For Further Research

Although the sample size represented by my research participants is too small to generalize from these results, it would be valuable to use the derived list of characteristics of good teaching as a basis for discussion in a teacher education seminar or in staff professional development. A large scale, quantitatively based study using a list of variables similar to those in Table 6 would also be worth conducting, with either practising or retired teachers as the sample.

Helping teachers to identify their professional metaphors by examining their autobiographical writing is also a promising area of research. The brief investigation in this area conducted with Anne Rasmussen was very insightful and generated valuable discussion. As I mentioned earlier in this thesis, work has already been conducted in this area by Bullough (1994), Knowles (1994) and others.

Further research could also involve a cross tabulation or multivariate analysis using independent variables such as years of experience or the decade in which the subjects were originally trained as teachers. I raise these statistical possibilities because I believe it is important that we continue to conduct quantitative research on teachers and teacher characteristics so that we avoid the "idioverse" (Spindler, 1982) mentioned in Chapter Three. The study of individual life stories or histories provides valuable but limited information for teacher research, as this study clearly demonstrates.

Finally, Howard (1992) believes that most experienced teachers have developed what he refers to as "personal theories" to define and codify their existing practice. Consistent with Howard's findings, a number of the teachers in my study used broad based maxims such as "If it worked for others, use it yourself", "Always meet the students half way" and "Don't introduce new material on Friday afternoon" both to guide their own teaching and to explain their actions to others. If the development of these "personal" theories is a common practice in teaching, then both teacher educators and educational researchers need to investigate the potential use of this information in our teacher training programs.

9.3.3 From a Personal Perspective

It has taken me three years to complete this thesis. As I read over and reflect on my journal entries covering the time spent in data collection, interviewing and writing, I see changes not only in my understanding of how teachers learn to teach, but also in my relationship with each of my research participants. As well as making a new group of friends, I have gained new understanding of how we learn to teach and how and why we become the teachers we are.

As a former principal and school superintendent, I believe that a deeper understanding of how teachers develop and change over the passage of their careers is information that should be taken into consideration when staffing individual schools. Even if one does not accept the evidence presented by Huberman (1993) and others regarding the existence of cycles or phases in the careers of teachers, a wise administrator should strive for balance on a particular staff in terms of age, energy and experience. As I have pointed out earlier in this dissertation, the ability to provide such a balance will become increasingly problematic if our senior teachers continue to leave the profession in large numbers with the full support of budget-minded boards and bureaucrats.

Although what I have completed on this journey may be construed as "research", I feel that my most valuable accomplishment was in providing additional insight into an important era in Alberta's educational past. The teachers described in this study lived and taught during one of the most turbulent periods in Canada's brief history, and I felt it was important to accurately represent what teaching was really like in the nine decades spanned by their life stories. A second and equally important reason for an accurate historical portrayal is that my research participants have given up their right to anonymity in this project and placed their trust in my ability to present their lives with precision and objectivity. I hope they will be satisfied with the results.

"To everything there is a season", the Bible tells us, and that includes the profession of teaching. What role can the university play in preparing new teachers for the rhythm of the classroom? How do we "tune them in" to the heartbeat of a community of learners? How do we convince them to trust their instincts with children and look beyond the teaching examples provided by their own teachers? It is my belief that part of the answer lies in helping each beginning teacher to explore and comprehend their own story and the lessons that lie within it. In other words, understanding the significance of the events and experiences that have influenced you in the past will help prepare you for the challenges that lie in the future. Or, as Molière has stated, "*Quelquefois, il faut reçuler pour mieux sauter.*"

Novak (1978) tells us that a story does not merely connect action to action. It also recounts a struggle.

> **Life, when it is life, is struggle; when struggle is taken away, life goes flat; boredom, shame, uneasiness emerge. The key struggle of life is that of psychic transformation; of breakthroughs in the way one perceives events, imagines oneself, and understands the world. A story not only links actions; it links transformations. The line a story follows is not straight, logical, step by step. It varies from life to life. Most often it zig zags, as if seeking out the spot for a breakthrough. Occasionally, there is a leap ahead, a profound shift in perception and purpose, 'a new life' [p. 53]**

As I listened to and recorded the life histories of the ten teachers in my study, I gained new insight into my own life story as well. I possess a better understanding of why I became a teacher and why I found administration far less satisfying as a career. Now, as I attempt to re-story myself as a teacher educator, it will be important to retrace the "zigs and zags" of my own existence to prepare me for the leap ahead. That is another journey, but one I embark upon now with ten new friends.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear ________,

I am a doctoral student in the Teacher Education Program at the University of Alberta. I am working under the direction of Dr. Grace Malicky, Associate Dean of Educational Research and Dr. Henry Hodysh, Professor of Educational History in the Faculty of Education. I am investigating the life stories of retired teachers who were trained at the University of Alberta between 1945 and 1955.

I would like to invite you to be part of my research project. Your participation would involve agreeing to a series of three or more interviews of approximately two hour's duration conducted at a place and time convenient to you. No one else will be present at those interviews and your confidentiality will be assured. Your identity would be protected by the use of a pseudonym if you so desire and all tapes will be transcribed by myself or by a professional employed for that purpose. No one else will have access to the interview tapes without your prior consent. A transcript of our conversation will be submitted to you for approval after each interview. You will have the right to make any changes you deem appropriate before the contents are reported in my research. You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time at your discretion.

I would also like your permission to use as part of my research any journals, diaries, letters, pictures or other personal artifacts you may have kept from your days as a teacher. You will have complete discretion as to which of these items is included in my research and alterations will be made to any copies taken to protect your identity or that of others as you deem necessary.

I have enclosed a consent form with this letter for you to sign and return to me through Departmental mail indicating your permission for me to conduct the interviews and participate in my study as outlined above. I will be in direct contact with you as soon as I have received your response. Should you have any further questions on any aspect of my research, please contact me at the University (Telephone 492-4273) or my home (433-5820). My advisors' telephone numbers are 492-3730 (Dr. Hodysh) or 492-3751 (Dr. Malicky).

I thank you in advance for your participation and look forward to our time together.

Sincerely,
Ed Nicholson,
Faculty of Education,
University of Alberta

CONSENT FORM

I hereby agree to participate in the research conducted by Ed Nicholson on the lives of retired teachers according to the conditions outlined in the letter attached to this form. I fully understand that I may withdraw from this project at any time and that my confidentiality is assured.

Signature ________________________

Date ________________

Name ______________________

Address ______________________

Telephone # ________________

Please return this signed consent form to the following address:

Ed Nicholson
# 807 10101 Saskatchewan Drive
EDMONTON AB T6E 4R6

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT PROFILES

TEACHER	ANNE	ALICE	MARGARET	MARY
Date of Birth	1931 02 05	1933 09 25	1921 05 09	1932 07 07
Birthplace	Flatbush, AB	Myrnam, AB	Bentley. AB	Smoky Lake, AB
Father's Occupation	Farming	Farming	Farming	Store
Mother's Occupation	Farming	Farming	Teacher	Store
Siblings Birth order	1 Youngest	1 Youngest	2 Eldest	2 Middle
School (Elementary)	Flatbush 1 -room	Uhryn 1-2 room	Centreview 1-room	Thorhild 4 Room
Training Began:	1952	1956	1938	1951
Program: Length:	Junior E 1 Year	Standard S 2 Years	Normal School 9 months	Junior E 1 Year
1st Year of Teaching:	1953	1953	1939	1952
School Name:	Gladwin	Bentley	Whitecreek	Halfmoon Lake
Where?	Jarvie	Bentley	Whitecreek	Waugh
Type of School:	1-Room	*Consolidated	1-Room	2-room
Grade Levels:	1-8	Gr 4	1-9	1-9
Size of Staff:	1	20	1	2
No. of Students:	20	40+	26	26
Majority of Career in:	Edmonton	Edmonton	Edmonton	Edmonton
Retired in:	1991	1991	1980	1994
Years of service:	36	35	28	28

(Continued on next page)

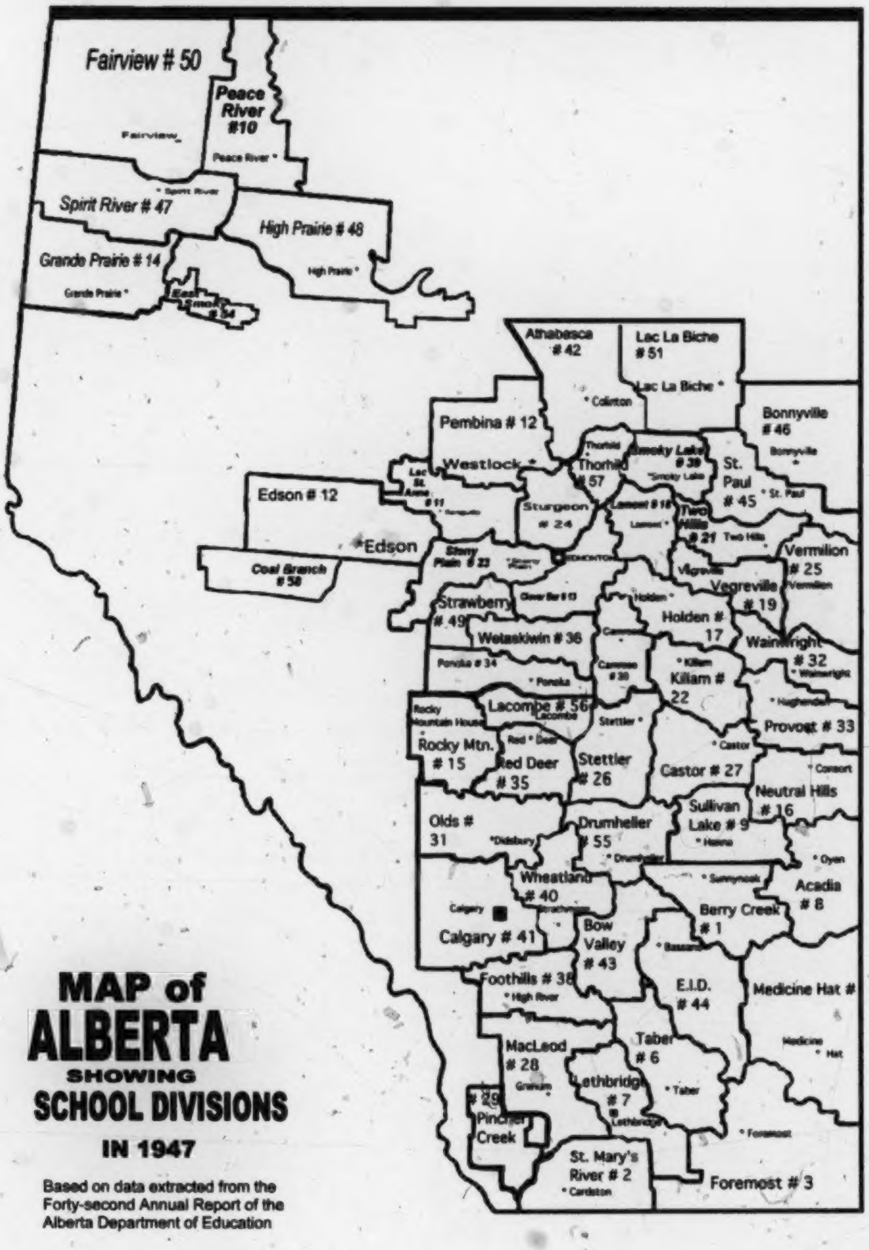
PEGGY	PAULINE	JIM	GERRY	GLENN	THOR
1929 01 22	1928 07 12	1916 11 13	1930 10 14	1926 10 14	1934 10 29
Saskatoon SK	Prosperity AB	Drumheller AB	Assiniboia SK	Carolside AB	Wetaskiwin AB
(Varied)	Farming	[Varied}	Mechanic	Rancher	Farming
Nursing Home Operator	Farming	Housewife	Housewife	Rancher	Farming
1 Eldest	5 Middle	4 Eldest	7 Middle	11 2nd youngest	3 Eldest
Edmonton (Mill Creek)	Prosperity 1- Room	Drumheller	Edmonton (Parkdale)	Square Deal 1-Room	Sparling
1950	1945	1951	1949	1954	1954
Junior E 1 + 1	++W.E.P. 8 months	B Ed 3 Years	B Ed El 4 years	B Ed El 4 Years	Junior E 1 Year
1952	1946	1951	1953	1955	1955
Guthrie	Gamefield	Prince Charles	Fort Sask. Elementary	Mill Creek	Rosebrier
Namao	Athabaska	Edmonton	Fort Sask.	Edmonton	Rosebrier
1-12 M**	1-Room	1-6 M	1-6 M	1-6 M	Consolidated
Gr 2	1-9	Gr 5	Gr. 5	Gr 3	6-9
24	1	12	7	10	5
25	19	28	35	25	26
Sherwood Park	Westlock	Edmonton	Edmonton	Edmonton	Edmonton
1984	1984	1979	1988	1991	1994
26	**34**	**28**	**35**	**35**	**39**

* See page 70 for information on Consolidated Schools

** M = Standard, multiclassroom school

++ W.E.P. = Wartime Emergency Program. See p 116

APPENDIX C: ALBERTA SCHOOL DIVISIONS – 1947


Fairview # 50
Fairview
Peace River #10
Peace River
Spirit River
Spirit River # 47
High Prairie # 48
High Prairie
Grande Prairie # 14
Grande Prairie
East Smoky # 54
Athabasca # 42
Colinton
Lac La Biche # 51
Lac La Biche
Bonnyville # 46
Bonnyville
Pembina # 12
Westlock
Thorhild
Thorhild # 57
Smoky Lake # 39
Smoky Lake
St. Paul # 45
St. Paul
Lac St. Anne # 11
Edson # 12
Edson
Sturgeon # 24
Lamont # 18
Lamont
Two Hills # 21
Two Hills
Vermilion # 25
Vermilion
Coal Branch # 58
Stony Plain # 23
Edmonton
Vegreville
Vegreville # 19
Strawberry # 49
Clover Bar # 13
Holden
Holden # 17
Wainwright # 32
Wainwright
Wetaskiwin # 36
Camrose
Camrose # 20
Killam
Killam # 22
Ponoka # 34
Ponoka
Hughenden
Provost # 33
Rocky Mountain House
Lacombe # 56
Lacombe
Stettler
Red Deer
Rocky Mtn. # 15
Red Deer # 35
Stettler # 26
Castor
Castor # 27
Consort
Neutral Hills # 16
Olds # 31
Didsbury
Drumheller # 55
Drumheller
Sullivan Lake # 9
Hanna
Oyen
Wheatland # 40
Strathmore
Sunnynook
Acadia # 8
Calgary
Calgary # 41
Bow Valley # 43
Berry Creek # 1
Bassano
Foothills # 38
High River
E.I.D. # 44
Medicine Hat #
Medicine Hat
Taber # 6
MacLeod # 28
Granum
Lethbridge # 7
Lethbridge
Taber
# 29 Pincher Creek
Foremost
St. Mary's River # 2
Cardston
Foremost # 3

MAP of

ALBERTA

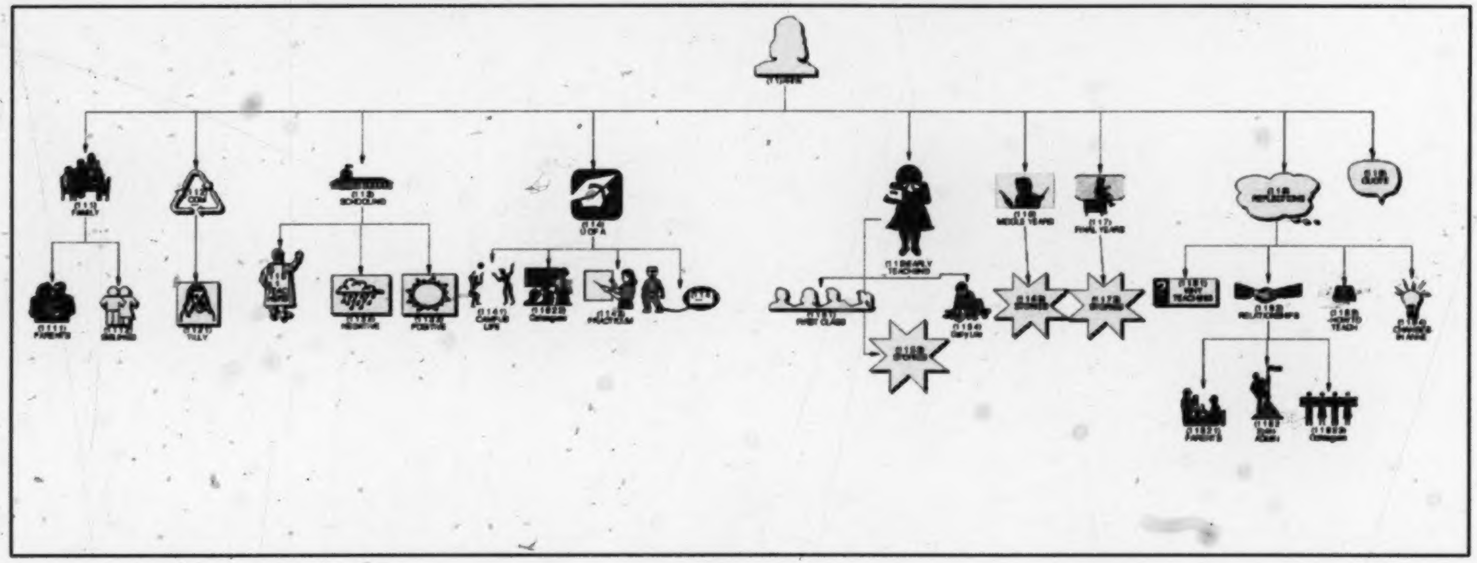
SHOWING

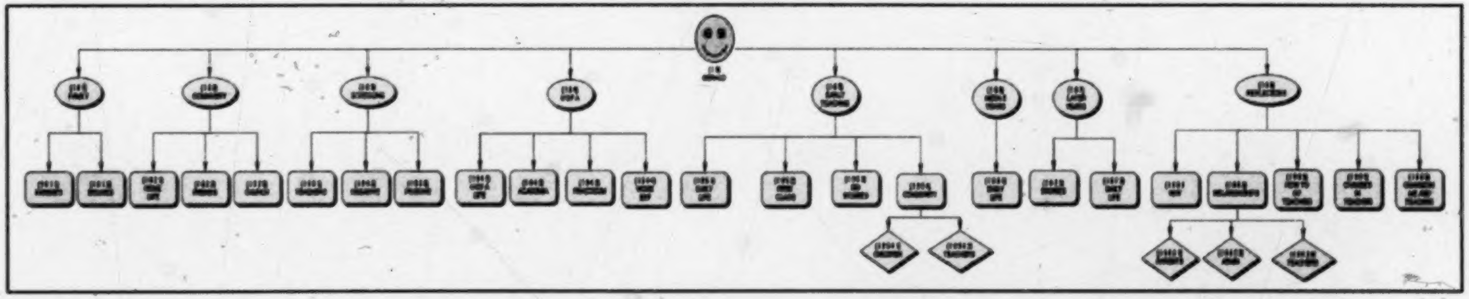
SCHOOL DIVISIONS

IN 1947

Based on data extracted from the Forty-second Annual Report of the Alberta Department of Education

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE NU*DIST PROFILES FOR ANNE AND GERRY


SCHOOLING
EARLY TEACHING
FIRST CLASS
STORIES
MIDDLE YEARS
FINAL YEARS
STORIES
STORIES
REFLECTIONS
RELATIONSHIPS
PARENTS
Colleagues



NOTE: NU*DIST profiles constructed with the INSPIRATION software program. For more information on the above, please refer to page 54.

APPENDIX E: QUESTION MATRIX PREPARED FOR INTERVIEW 3

	QUESTION	A R	A H	G G	G M	J H	M W	M S	P M	P H	T L
1.	Changes in the curriculum over the decades.										
2.	Changes in your classroom over the decades.										
3.	What do you *see* when you look back?										
4.	Effects of the War on your life (teaching or schooling)										
5.	Looking back, how different was your teaching from the way you were taught?										
6.	How do you think you learned to teach?										
7.	State your Educational Philosophy.										
8.	Was there any particular Educational Theorist who had a strong influence on your teaching?										
9.	Advice to the rookie question.										
10.	"Special training'" for the rural experience [Mary]										
11.	Feeling after being offered your first job										
12.	Thor talks about times when he had to work to control his anger or frustration and even left the room to do so. What about you?										
13.	Quote Pauline " In my last years I found teaching very stressful." Ask others about changes in feelings towards teaching.										
14.	Reviewing Pictures together.										
15.	Gerry could actually visualize those early classrooms as we talked. What about the others?										
16.	Do you ever dream about teaching now that you are retired?										
17.	First job interview.										
18.	A typical day/schedule at the beginning of career.										
19.	A typical day each decade. Is it easy to recall the "daily grind"?										
20.	How would you describe your teaching personality?										
21.	Incident where you learned with or from the students or a student.										

22.	Can we all learn to teach or are we born to teach? Is teaching an art or a science?										
23.	Any regrets about your career choice or decisions along the way?										
24.	When did you know that you had made the right choice of a profession?										
25.	First time you can remember really feeling like a teacher.										
26.	Rite of Passage question										
27.	If you were choosing a career now would you choose teaching?										
28.	First day of teaching stories?										
29.	Your advice if your grandchildren or child of a friend asked about entering teaching today.										
30.	Why do we remember certain children out of all those we have taught?										
31.	Does your teaching career have 3 parts or stages?										
32.	Strapping story as student.										
33.	Strapping Story as teacher.										
34.	Ask for adult encounter stories; i.e., meeting students long after.										
35.	Did your U OF A teachers influence you?										
36.	How do you see teaching changing in the future?										
37.	Question for the four men about being in Elementary										
38.	Why did you retire?										
39.	What changes do you recommend be made in teacher training?										
40.	What is your impression of the teachers coming out of teacher training today?										
41.	When you meet and talk to young teachers today are they different in any way from yourself at the same age?										
42.	Is there anything in your career we have not touched upon that you would like to raise now?										

NOTE: Not all questions were asked of all informants. For discussion on the use of this matrix during the interview process, see page 52.